

Letters to Audrey

Being a delightful and humorous view of village life
in Brocton between 1930 and 1960 as revealed in a series of gossipy letters.



MAJORIE JEAVONS

FOREWORD

Marjorie Jeavons often entertained her friends and relatives with "goings-on" in the village of Brocton, Stafford in the 1930's and '40's. Her friends often told her to write down her memories as they were so interesting and amusing.

On Christmas Day 1993 Marjorie was invited to have Christmas Dinner with her next door neighbours in Old Acre Lane, the Sutton family. Over the meal Marjorie had related another fascinating tale of her childhood in what was then a rural village. As she cleared away the dinner table her hostess Audrey Sutton said to her guest, "I wish you would write down some of the things you talk about." When Marjorie returned to her home she decided to take up Audrey's suggestion. She started off writing letters to Audrey relating her memories in a novel and very readable way.

Originally from Yorkshire, Marjorie came to live in Brocton in the 1930's when her father Walter Jeavons was offered work with the Brocton Gravel Company. At first the family felt like outsiders but gradually they were accepted into the rural community and played a very active role in the life of the village. Little did Marjorie think that when she moved with her parents to 37 Old Acre Lane in 1934 that she would still be there in 1996.

The Brocton Gravel Company is no more but in its place is a beautiful nature reserve. It is very popular with young and old alike and a special treat for young children is to be taken to feed the geese who congregate on the pool.

Marjorie Jeavons in her letters to Audrey has recorded for posterity a very interesting part of Brocton's history which will be of interest to all, but particularly to people who know or have lived in the village.

Jim Foley
Autumn 1996

MARJORIE JEAVONS

On leaving school in 1937 Marjorie Jeavons' one ambition was to become a teacher. Teacher training was not as readily available as it is today and it was expensive, especially when Government grants were not available. Miss Jeavons decided to enrol with a small commercial college for a one year course in Business Studies.

She then obtained employment as a book-keeper with Baileys the iron-mongers in Gaolgate Street, Stafford and was there at the outbreak of the war in September 1939. In 1942 on her 21st birthday Miss Jeavons was called up for War Service in Industry. She became a lathe operator in the English Electric Company Tank Shop making components for tanks.

After the war Marjorie was obliged by law to return to the work she was doing before the war if she was still required there. Her services were required so she returned to book-keeping but her ambition to become a teacher was still strong. She decided to qualify as a craft teacher. The first step was to learn to drive so that she could attend evening classes and be mobile. Miss Jeavons then enrolled on various evening classes and became proficient in a variety of crafts - dress-making, canework, lampshade making, stool and chair seating, and glove making to name a few.

In those days there was a great demand for craft teachers to do evening work. As she was now mobile and wasn't worried about the unsocial hours Marjorie Jeavons took up teaching craft.

Her car, a Ford Prefect, was always cluttered up with craft materials as she went from one class to the next.

In 1959 she decided to give up her book-keeping job and to study for a Teaching Certificate with the London Institute of City and Guilds. She qualified in 1960.

In 1962 Marjorie obtained a full-time teaching post at Stafford College of Arts and Crafts. On retirement in 1983 she looked forward to a leisured life of gardening, craftwork and enjoying the company of friends and relatives.

In May 1992 she was diagnosed as suffering from Parkinson's Disease - an illness she had suffered from since 1987. She also suffers from pernicious anaemia, arthritis and has sight in only one eye.

Despite all this she still remains cheerful and optimistic and with the help of friends and relatives and especially her next door neighbour Audrey, manages to live as normal a life as possible under the circumstances.

Marjorie still enjoys a game of scrabble and now that she has written her first book at the age of 75 will no doubt be looking round for other ways to pass her time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is dedicated to Audrey Sutton who sparked off the original idea. I owe Audrey a lot and to write a few letters seemed an easy way to show my appreciation.

I would like to thank all the friends who have given me help and encouragement along the way -

Linda Crutchley, Audrey's sister, for volunteering to organise the typing and copying of the original letters,

Ethel Cooper my cousin for shared memories and the loan of precious photographs,

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Bob Mudway for putting me in touch with Rupert and for his interest and practical help,

Dorothy Perry for her knowledge of whist and the protocol of Whist Drives,

Elsie Griffin for memories of the 'goings-on' at the Institute, particularly the Dramatic Society and Produce Guild,

Sue and John Hodgens for the loan of photographs,

Jim Foley for his help, advice and time, and

Betty Chaddock who so excellently typed the final copy.

Marjorie Jeavons
"Brinscliffe"
Old Acre Lane
Brocton

August 1996



Marjorie Jeavons

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A WHIFF OF COUNTRY LIFE

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

30 December 1994

Dear Audrey,

Thank you very much for the book, Down Memory Lane, which you gave me for Christmas. I found it very interesting especially as I can remember quite a few of the people who are mentioned in the book and I know or have known some of those who contributed memories.

You always show interest when I recall little incidents which happened years ago but unfortunately my family were not natives of this area so I cannot go back in history.

We moved to Staffordshire when my father's employer, Frederick Bramhall, decided to open a gravel quarry and asked my father, Walter Jeavons, to move to Brocton and work on the new project. We were at that time living in the village of Catcliffe, near to Rotherham in Yorkshire. Dad was employed in emptying the "dirt wagons" at the nearby Treeton Colliery or "Pit" as it was more usually known. The "dirt" was the rubbish or unburnable material which was disturbed when the coal was cut. The usable coal was loaded into wagons in the railway siding ready to be despatched to the users, iron foundries, steel works and other industrial outlets. Some would be stockpiled in the colliery yard to be collected by local coal merchants or in hard times simply stockpiled. The miner's allowance coal was collected by the coal merchant and delivered home. Although the coal was free, a charge was made for the delivery and this was known locally as the leading (rhymes with feeding).

As far as I can make out from childhood memories, Mr. Bramhall was a free-lance contractor whose job was to empty the wagon loads of dirt onto the spoil heaps when they had been hauled to the site. Dad's job seemed to be to organise a gang of men to shovel the dirt out of the wagons and to spread it on the banks. The men were, I suspect, day labourers but Dad had a weekly wage. They were all paid by the contractor, Mr. Bramhall, not the colliery.

Dad was keen to make the suggested move to Brocton as it meant a rise in pay. Otherwise he was going to have to look for a new job or hope for employment by whoever took on the contract. My mother, Eva, was not at all keen to move away from Yorkshire. She had lived all her life in the environs of Rotherham with her family close by and it was a great upheaval she was being asked to contemplate. However, Mother's younger brother, Bill Revill, was also invited to join the workforce of the newly formed Brocton Gravel Company Limited. Uncle Bill's wife and their two younger children were to come too. Harry, who was seventeen years of age, was to work for the company and his sister, Ethel, who had celebrated her sixteenth birthday a week before the move was hoping to find work locally. Ethel is, of course, my cousin and next door neighbour, Ethel Cooper.



Grandmother Ann Revill



Grandfather Thomas Revill



My mother
Eva Jeavons (nee Revill)



My father
Walter Jeavons

Uncle Bill moved first to oversee the installation of the machinery, always referred to as the "Plant", like some giant aspidistra. The family followed on Friday, 13 January 1930 and they were lucky enough to rent a bungalow on Pool Lane. It was named "Woodlands" and is the second bungalow on the Milford side of the present Post Office. Rented accommodation in Brocton was very difficult to obtain in those days. We had quite a problem finding somewhere to live.

Brocton Village in those days comprised of a number of large houses belonging to the local gentry, a scattering of farms and small holdings and a few cottages, several of which were picturesquely thatched. Except for one detached and a pair of semi-detached houses, and the bungalows along the left hand side of Pool Lane going towards Milford, there were no other houses in Brocton except for a few wooden bungalows converted from Army huts. There were no houses on Sawpit Lane, no Crescents or Closes.

Even when a house came on the market, or was available to rent, we were at a disadvantage. Well, would you have looked with favour on people connected with the quarry? We were strangers, we spoke English with a foreign accent and no-one knew anything about us or our ancestors. Why the land belonging to Brocton Gate was up for sale I do not know, but it was this land which was being quarried for gravel. The operation was noisy and dusty and there was an endless procession through the village of lorries loaded with gravel and sand. Whether the Brocton residents made any protest about the industrial encroachment into their lives I was too young to understand, but I can imagine the protest that would be made if the same circumstances arose today and I have no doubt I should be there protesting with the rest.

On one occasion we were as good as promised the tenancy of a house but before the tenancy agreement was finalised the offer was apologetically withdrawn because the near neighbours did not want "work people" living in the vicinity. Disappointing and hurtful, but who can blame them? We might have been given to rolling home drunk on a Saturday night!

My father eventually lodged with Aunt Annie and Uncle Bill at the "Woodlands", leaving Mother and me at Catcliffe, Yorkshire. I was about eight years old at the time and had just had a severe bout of diphtheria. It was decided that as Dad was not at home we might as well go to stay at Uncle Harry's farm. Uncle was Mother's eldest brother and the farm was at Sutton, near to Retford in Nottinghamshire. Mother had also been very ill with high blood pressure. The strain of looking after me for close on six months did not help matters. We stayed at Sutton for close on five weeks and I loved it. One of my jobs was to fetch the cows up (all three of them) for afternoon milking and my cousin Max was more than willing to let me deliver the milk afterwards. This was supposed to be his job but he was quite willing to relinquish the honour and I have no doubt I felt very important flap-flapping round the village in my sandals with a can of milk in each hand.

Shortly afterwards we came down to stay in Brocton so Mother could do a bit of house hunting. She could not have been very successful because it was not until the January following my ninth birthday that we moved, not to Brocton as we had hoped but to Walton-on-the-Hill. The address was No. 9 New Road at that time but subsequently it was named Old Croft Road. I do not know the present number but it was at that time the last house on the left hand side of the road.

It was, and still is, a double fronted red brick house with bay windows to the downstairs rooms but not to the bedrooms. The house was not set squarely at 90 degrees to the road as were the other houses but at a slight angle looking down the road to the top of The Rise.

We lived there just over a year. It was a lovely house but at twenty five shillings (One pound twenty five pence) it was too expensive for us. We had only paid ten shillings (fifty pence) a week in Yorkshire.

Dad was also feeling the strain of cycling to and from work along the Cannock Road. The A34 was very busy in those pre-motorway days with heavy lorries and trailers making up most of the traffic. Dad was knocked off his bike two or three times by a swaying trailer so, although he got off with a few bruises, it seemed urgent that we found other accommodation.

Harold Richardson and his wife Laura (nee Perry) had just taken over Bank Farm, Brocton. As ready cash was not over plentiful they were looking for someone to rent part of the farmhouse. It was pleasantly situated well away from the farm buildings and manure heaps. We had the two front rooms downstairs, one of the bedrooms was over our sitting room but the second bedroom was smaller and faced the back. There was a bathroom of sorts but the bath was all it contained. Our part of the house had no other water supply than that contained by the bathroom taps, so we had a board across the bath with an enamelled bowl on it to serve as a wash basin. All water for cooking and washing up was fetched from an outside tap and heated on the coal fire. It was the first fireplace with inglenooks I had seen.

The biggest drawback from my point of view, and no doubt of others too, was the two-seater "earth closet" up the garden. This brick building was discreetly screened by lilac bushes and we had an amicable arrangement with the Richardsons; we sat to the left and they used the right hand side. One side, you may guess which, was amply supplied with the Farmer and Stock Breeder or some similar Farmers' Journal.

The front bedroom and the sitting room were oak panelled but at some time a tenant had tacked hessian over the panelling and wallpapered the downstairs room. This had been removed by the simple expedient of ripping the hessian away leaving all the tacks in situ. My mother spent hours with a pair of pincers removing tacks. I was, every so often, coerced into lending a hand, but to a ten year old it was a tedious, boring job.

A year later, after getting the place something like ship-shape, we had the chance of a cottage to rent. It was really the gardener's cottage belonging to Brocton Leys. At that time it was owned by Harold Riley who had a shoe factory in the Marston Road area of Stafford. The reason the cottage was available was because Mr. Slinn, the Riley's gardener, had his own cottage on the Village Green and he did not wish to move.

The old Slinn cottage is currently the home of Mrs. Burnside. The cottage we rented was known as "Rose Cottage" but the name was, I believe, changed to "Brocton Cottage" some years ago. I can appreciate that a change of name might be desirable if, perhaps, the roses had died off, but why should this particular cottage be singled out to bear the name of the village?



9 New Road (Old Croft Road) Walton on the Hill where we first lived when we came to Stafford from Yorkshire. It is now 15 Old Croft Road. In the back garden can just be seen the branches of a very old oak tree. Children of the village used to play in the hollow centre of the huge oak.



I am the girl in the middle of this photo. The hollow trunk of the very old oak tree still stands today in the back garden of a house in Old Croft Road. It was then 9 New Road, Walton on the Hill. The girl on the left, Gillian Orchard - now Mrs. Gill Bentley - lived in a house on Walton Bank - now The Rise. Doris Flint is the girl on the right. Notice there are no houses where today you have Anson Drive to the left and Cedar Way running along the back where the trees are. Oak Avenue today is to the right of the photo.

Mrs. Kennedy lived there until quite recently when she had to go into care as she could no longer look after herself. The section of the road from the top of Old Coach Road to Rose Cottage was always known as Riley's Corner. The name continued to be used for years after the Riley family moved away. At the time we lived in the cottage there was a donkey in the paddock which adjoined our garden. If he was feeling bored he used to stick his head over the hedge and hee-haw for some attention and hopefully a carrot or other tit-bit. His voice was the most raucous I have heard and it must have been a bit rusty because he had to wind himself up with a dozen or so "hees" before he could manage the "haw". He was an amusing old thing.

Another animal story concerned the kitchen cat. She was an attractive tortoiseshell colour and if she felt like having a quiet snooze she would nip over to our place and purloin Dad's arm chair. Most Saturday mornings found her smelling faintly perfumed and squeaky clean. Mrs. Riley's cook maintained that if puss was going to live in the kitchen where food was prepared then she had to be clean. Consequently she was bathed every Saturday unless she managed to get away and hide. She usually spent the rest of the morning diligently licking away to remove the perfume and sneezing splashily at intervals. When she was satisfied she no longer smelt like a scented soap factory she would curl up on our hearth rug and sleep until teatime.

Rose Cottage was a great improvement on the rooms at the farm in all but one respect. On the plus side, we were the sole occupants, there was gas for lighting the downstairs rooms - much more convenient and efficient than the paraffin lamps - and a stark but useful gas cooker in the kitchen. Unfortunately the gas main was inadequate for the demands made on it at peak periods, one of which was Sunday lunch time. If you liked your Yorkshire puddings nice and crisp it was advisable to eat at 12 o'clock rather than 1 o'clock.

There was a good supply of cold water to the kitchen sink and another tap to serve the wash boiler or copper in the outside wash house. Hot water was available only by the kettlefull heated on the living room range or on the gas stove, or both if any quantity was needed. If you did not mind having your weekly bath on a Monday you could always make use of the wash house while the copper fire was still alight after the family wash day.

The big drawback was the bucket lavatory which had to be emptied once a week, or more often if we had visitors and the contents were given a decent burial in a remote part of the large garden. This job Dad found extremely distasteful and Mother and I kept well clear of the burial if we knew what was good for us.

The little terrace house in Yorkshire had no indoor sanitation but the W.C. in the little back yard had a very efficient flushing mechanism and it disposed of waste material with no fuss at all.

Staffordshire seemed to lag a long way behind in the efficient disposal of sewage. The house at Walton had a very nice bathroom and an outside toilet as well but the septic tank drainage left much to be desired. In fact, regurgitation would have been a more accurate description than drainage, especially in times of heavy rain.

We only lived at Rose Cottage for just over a year. Mr. Bramhall made good his promise to build two Company houses, one for my father and the other for his niece and her husband, Ethel (nee Hall) and Harold Briggs. The reason Uncle Bill and his family were not included in the housing project is because he had sadly died whilst we were still living at Bank Farm.

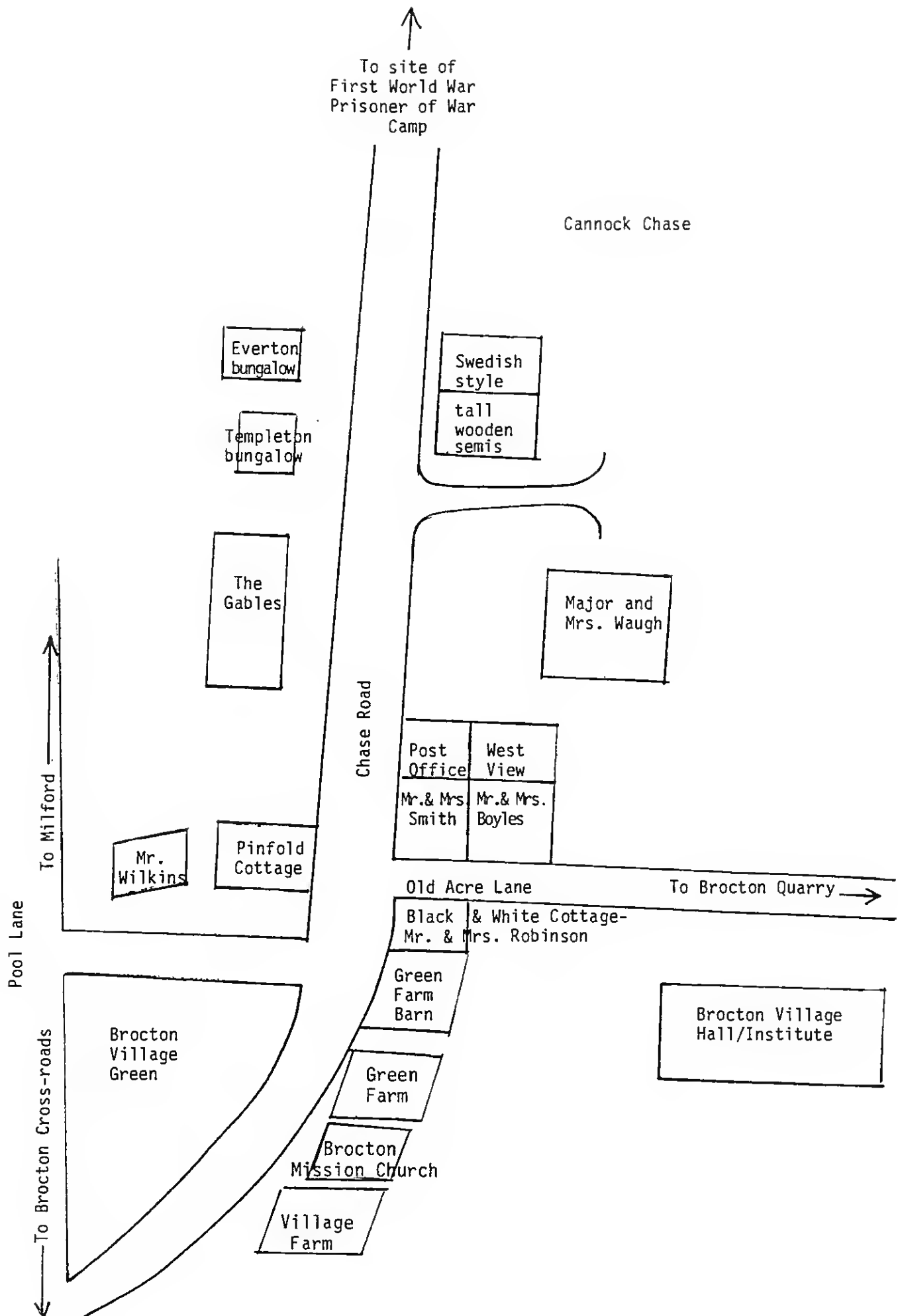
As the houses along Old Acre Lane were few and far between they were given names, not numbers. Mother, wanting to avoid all reference to heather, gorse, bracken or the Chase, decreed that our house should be known as "Brinscliffe", not because of the steep slope on which it is built but because we had lived at Brinsworth Road, Catcliffe. The Briggs decided to call their house "Heatherdene". The pair of houses are now officially Nos. 37 and 39 Old Acre Lane, as you well know.

That is all for now but we will stroll up the Lane when I write again.

All the Best,
Marjorie



Brinscliffe, the semi on the left, now 37 Old Acre Lane. Originally a Brocton Gravel Company house. We moved there in September 1934. I didn't expect to be in the same house in 1996. Audrey Sutton and her family live next door at No. 39 where Mr. Briggs of Brocton Quarry used to live.



OLD ACRE LANE

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford
ST17 0TW

Dear Audrey,

There was a slogan during the war, "Careless talk costs lives". This was true at the time but on a happier note look what a casual remark can do. "I think you should write down your memories", you said over your shoulder as you cleared away the remains of our Christmas dinner. I did not take you seriously at the time as I was feeling well fed and contentedly lazy. Thinking about it later I decided it might be fun. At least if I enjoy the writing and you the reading, what else does it matter? It should provide some exercise for my brain cells (what's left of them) and must be better than going to sleep after lunch.

It was the late summer of 1934 when we moved to Old Acre Lane. Apart from the fact that the roadway had been surfaced with tar and gravel (locally quarried, of course) for the convenience of the lorries transporting the gravel, it was still very much a country lane. The steep grass verges were peppered with wild flowers and damson trees lined the way. In a mining village you do not find fruit trees overhanging the boundary of gardens or orchards - not with any fruit on anyway.

The Black and White Cottage, home of Mr. & Mrs. George Robinson and their family stood on the right hand corner of Old Acre Lane, very much as it does today except that it has been extended to accommodate a bathroom and has suffered a few direct hits from rampant gravel lorries, particularly those fighting a losing battle with the steepness of Chase Road on a frosty morning. Loyalty prompts me to say they had no connection with the Brocton Gravel Company. George Robinson was a printer by trade and I think he had employment in Stafford, but he also had a little printing press in a small workshop at the bottom of his garden. There were three daughters, Kathleen, Joan and Nina and a son named Alf. I think there may have been another daughter but if so she was not living at home. Joan was older than I was and Nina a little younger.

On the opposite corner of Old Acre Lane was the garden of the Post Office which stood a little way up Chase Road. Mrs. Les Smith was the Post Mistress and Les, I think, worked at what was then the English Electric Co.Ltd. (previously Siemens and later to be the G.E.C.) His brother, Cecil, also lived at the Post Office. The Smiths were at this time childless but later had a daughter, Margaret. Margaret had a good singing voice, as had her father.

Semi-detached to the Post Office was West View, the home of Mr. & Mrs. Boyles. Mr. Boyles was a car mechanic I think, (at least he was employed in the motor trade). I don't think I ever knew his christian name. He was tragically killed in a motoring accident involving several local families, not very long after we moved to Brocton.



The Black and White Cottage, Brocton.
Just visible on the left of the photo is the
village Post Office.



Brocton Village Green with Pinfold Cottage on the left.

Mrs. Boyles, I have a feeling her name may have been Lilian, I got to know quite well when we both travelled to work on the same 'bus. There were two boys. Raymond, the elder son, lives in Sawpit Lane and David, who followed in his father's footsteps, went into the motor trade and had his own garage on the A34, just on the Stafford side of Brocton Cross Roads. You, I am sure, know David's wife and family better than I do. David died very unexpectedly at a comparatively early age. No-one would have recognised Raymond and David as brothers as they were not alike in looks or disposition.

Back to the right hand side of Old Acre Lane and the next building, over the hedge from Mr. Robinson's was Brocton Village Hall. This was to all appearances a converted army hut from the 1914 - 18 War when there was a Prisoner of War Camp on the Chase. When the camp was disbanded the huts were obviously sold off and they crop up in various parts of the village in different disguises.

The huts themselves varied, some were accommodation huts and those for the Officers were designed to give more individual privacy than those allocated to the Privates! Some no doubt were fitted out as administration buildings to cope with the day to day logistics of running the camp. The prisoners too would have to be accommodated. Some of them did not survive to go home and they were buried at the Military Cemetery on Cannock Chase.

The Old Village Hall provided a useful service but it was not exactly the acme of comfort. The entrance doors opened directly into the smaller of the two function rooms. To the right was the kitchen with a service hatch and beyond the kitchen was the ladies cloakroom. To the left on the far side of the "little" room was the "big" room. (Nice distinction!) There was a stage at the far end and doors at either side of the platform led to a dressing room-cum-storage area. Take note, there is no mention of a Gentlemen's cloakroom. In those days the main rooms were heated by individual gas burning radiators which got hot to the touch but did not give out adequate heat to warm the atmosphere. Seating was provided by wooden chairs of a similar style to Windsor kitchen chairs. There was a choice of tables to meet various needs. Folding card tables for the popular Whist Drives and trestle tables of various sizes for serving refreshments, displaying rummage or other goods for sale. Woe betide you if you matched the wrong shaped trestle to a tabletop.

In spite of the lack of luxury it was a popular meeting place, not only for Brocton residents but for people from Acton and Bednal, Milford and Walton and one or two places off the beaten track. For some strange reason it was never called the Village Hall but Brocton Institute, or more familiarly, "The Institute".

Back up the steeply sloping path to continue along the lane. Once past the Institute there were no houses for quite a distance, then on the left, just about where Dorothy Davies' garden meets Old Acre Lane, were two thatched cottages. The first one was occupied by Mr. & Mrs. Jack Barnett and their three sons, Sidney, George and Peter.

Whenever they had a spare minute the boys could be seen practising golf in Bob Cartwright's field alongside the public footpath which leads across the fields to the Chetwynd Arms Public House or to Bank Farm, depending on the direction taken after crossing the brook.

George in particular was keen on golf and at weekends he earned his pocket money acting as a caddy at Brocton Hall Golf Club. In later years he had a radio and television business at Rugeley. Our first television set came from George.

Next door to the Barnetts lived Mr. & Mrs. Jenkinson, a frail looking couple who must have been tougher than they looked. The two cottages were not mirror images of one another, although they were semi-detached. The Jenkinson's cottage was smaller than its neighbour but it had a small single storey annex built on the side. There was no access to this room from the cottage. It was necessary to go out through the only exterior door of the cottage (which was round the back) and into the annex from the pathway. The Jenkinson's used the room as a bedroom, perhaps because they found the cottage stairs difficult, and Mrs. Barnett who had to be up early to get her brood off to work or school, used to make a pot of early morning tea and hand it in through the bedroom window to Mrs. Jenkinson. As far as I remember the room was not heated regularly, so no doubt the hot drink was very welcome and allowed them to start the day in a leisurely fashion.

The next house, still on the left hand side of Old Acre Lane was a bungalow known as Jasmine, (currently the home of Charlie Tams). This was built for a Miss Gough and intended, so my parents said, as her retirement home. Miss Gough was a teacher at one of the Stafford schools and she had for some time had a weekend pied-a-terre on the site, probably one of the ubiquitous army huts.

Of this I can't be sure, but it appeared to be quite large and was made of wood. What went wrong with the plans for retiring into the bungalow I doubt if anyone knows, but if Miss Gough did take up residence in the bungalow, it was not for very long.

When I can first remember it, a Mr. & Mrs. Bamford lived there. They had one son a little older than me, his name was Eric. The Bamford family soon moved to Walton on the Hill and lived just above the church in one of the houses opposite the Pinfold. Miss Gough lived in a cottage behind the Old Golf House (? Brocton Hollow) and pied-a-terre was occupied for a while by a gentleman who bred Sealyham terriers. Well, I presume he bred them, he always seemed to be accompanied by about twenty small dogs who were determined to plait their leads into the most intricate patterns, almost strangling one another in the process.

Next to the "retirement" bungalow was a picturesque thatched cottage, the home of Miss Elizabeth Smallwood. She was known to the villagers as Lizzy Smallwood. Whether she would have preferred to be Elizabeth I don't know, but it requires a lot of determination to avoid the mutilation of a baptismal name. I don't mind who addresses me as Marjorie, but I prefer not to answer to Marge. I was at one time Aunt Marje to a friend's Alsation dog but at least Flash had the good sense not to address me as such. When I was a child marge or margarine was a very inferior commodity, cholesterol had not been invented and you bragged about best butter. Marge was only spread on the bread of those who had difficulty in making ends meet financially.

Sorry, I got side-tracked. Back to Miss Smallwood - she always looked attractive and was very pleasant to talk to. She served teas to visitors. Wednesday afternoon, early closing day (or half day) for the Stafford shops, and weekends were the busy times, especially in the summer months.



OLD COTTAGES, OLDACHE, BROXTON, STAFFORD

Lizzie Smallwood seated and her niece Elizabeth Smallwood outside their cottage where you could have tea in the living room or in a wooden building outside in the garden which served as a tea-room.



Marjorie Jeavons aged about 5 with Peter

I think you could have tea in the cottage living room, but this may have been a special favour or for a small family group at less busy times. The main tea room was a wooden building close to the hedge marking the boundary with Old Acre Lane.

Not so long after we came to live in the Lane Lizzy married an old friend, Tom Davies, who was in the Prison service. They went to live on the Isle of Wight until Tom retired. I struck up an acquaintanceship with him many years later. He used to visit patients in Fernleigh Hospital on Marston Road. He was kind enough to sit and chat to my father on Friday afternoons until I could get up there and take over. He would then visit other patients until four o'clock when I gave him a lift home to Walton. He admitted one day that the reason he would not marry until his mother died was because he did not think it was fair to expect his wife and his mother to share a kitchen. I found him interesting to talk to and I admired the way he could chat to comparative strangers if they had no visitors to talk to.

The cottage, I don't remember it having a name, everyone seemed to refer to it as Lizzy Smallwood's (difficult when another family moved in for a time) had a very long garden. When Mr. Bramhall decided to build the two houses, one for Dad and the other for the Briggs family, he purchased a strip of land across the end of Lizzy's garden. The land owner was, I am almost sure, the Earl of Lichfield. The site was very convenient as it was only a stone's throw from the Quarry Gates. By mutual agreement Mr. Briggs had the end house because he wanted to be able to keep an eye on the Quarry Office and weighbridge and we had the one nearer the village because the kitchen faced north. In those days we did not have a fridge and domestic freezers were not known, so a cool kitchen and pantry were important. Also Mother tended to feel the heat.

Across the lane, opposite Miss Smallwood's tea room, lived Mr. & Mrs. Bill Rustell and their only daughter Doris (Dolly) in a wooden bungalow, another converted ex-army hut. A shallow stream ran along the boundary and the entrance to the property was across a sturdy plank bridge with hand rails and trellis covered with rambler roses. After the prettiness of the bridge the bungalow seemed dim and airless. First you entered a lean-to wash house and storage area from which steps led up to the kitchen door. Across the kitchen, and a little to the left of centre, was the door to the living room which ran the full width of the bungalow. Facing you as you entered was the cooking range and on the extreme left there was a door which opened onto a corridor. Three or four bedrooms opened off the right hand side of the passage and a door at the far end gave access to a bedroom the size of the living room. An interesting and unusual feature of the Rustell home was the bath. In the absence of a bathroom the bath was set below floor level, just in front of the living room fire. The bath was, if my memory is accurate, equipped with its own cold water supply but hot water, pre-heated on the range or in the washing boiler in the lean-to, was carried by the bucketful and poured into the bath. For convenience the bath had its own drainage pipe and it was covered by a trap door under the hearth rug. I only saw it once, but instead of the cosy warmth of a bath in front of the fire the picture conjures up, I found it rather sinister.

The question I am unable to answer is, where did the rest of the family go or what did they do whilst each bather in turn occupied the tub?

The last house in Old Acre Lane was next in line to the Rustell establishment. It was another ex-army building but of a different design. Originally it had comprised two identical sections like a pair of semi-detached bungalows. One half had been converted into a double and a single bedroom, entrance hall and a pleasantly large living room which faced onto the lane. To the rear was a kitchen and pantry. To gain access to the rooms in the other half of the building you had to cross the living room and then the sitting room which opened off. This brought you into a short corridor, the equivalent of the entrance hall at the other end, which gave access to two more bedrooms. The bathroom, which I am almost sure opened out of the sitting room and what was known as the honey room took the place of the kitchen and pantry. The owner, as you have no doubt surmised, was a bee keeper and the honey room housed the equipment for his hobby, and more besides. Access to the honey room was from outside, much more convenient than if it had opened off the sitting room.

Obviously there were one or two minor inconveniences in the design. From the bedrooms at one end you had to traverse the entire living area to reach the other sleeping accommodation and the bathroom. To reach the sitting room visitors had to be piloted through the family living room, but the conversion had been tastefully done and the general appearance was very attractive. The roofing felt had been replaced by square red tiles and there was a verandah at the front with posts which supported some flourishing rambler and climbing roses.

Originally intended as a weekend retreat by the Buttery family who lived at Ooxey, it became their permanent home when Mr. Buttery was made redundant from one of the Stafford factories, Dorman's I think. Redundancy pay then was not as generous as it is today and in fact in many cases it was non-existent. I presume the move to Brocton was a cost-cutting exercise. Mr. Buttery believed in self sufficiency and he erected a large greenhouse and grew and sold tomatoes and salad vegetables. Rhubarb and apples were plentiful, along with damsons in season, some soft fruit and a few pears. Then there was, of course, honey both from the heather on the Chase and from the local clover crop. During the Wartime Mr. Buttery's produce was very welcome and, being near neighbours, we often got "early warning signals" on what was, or would shortly be available for sale.

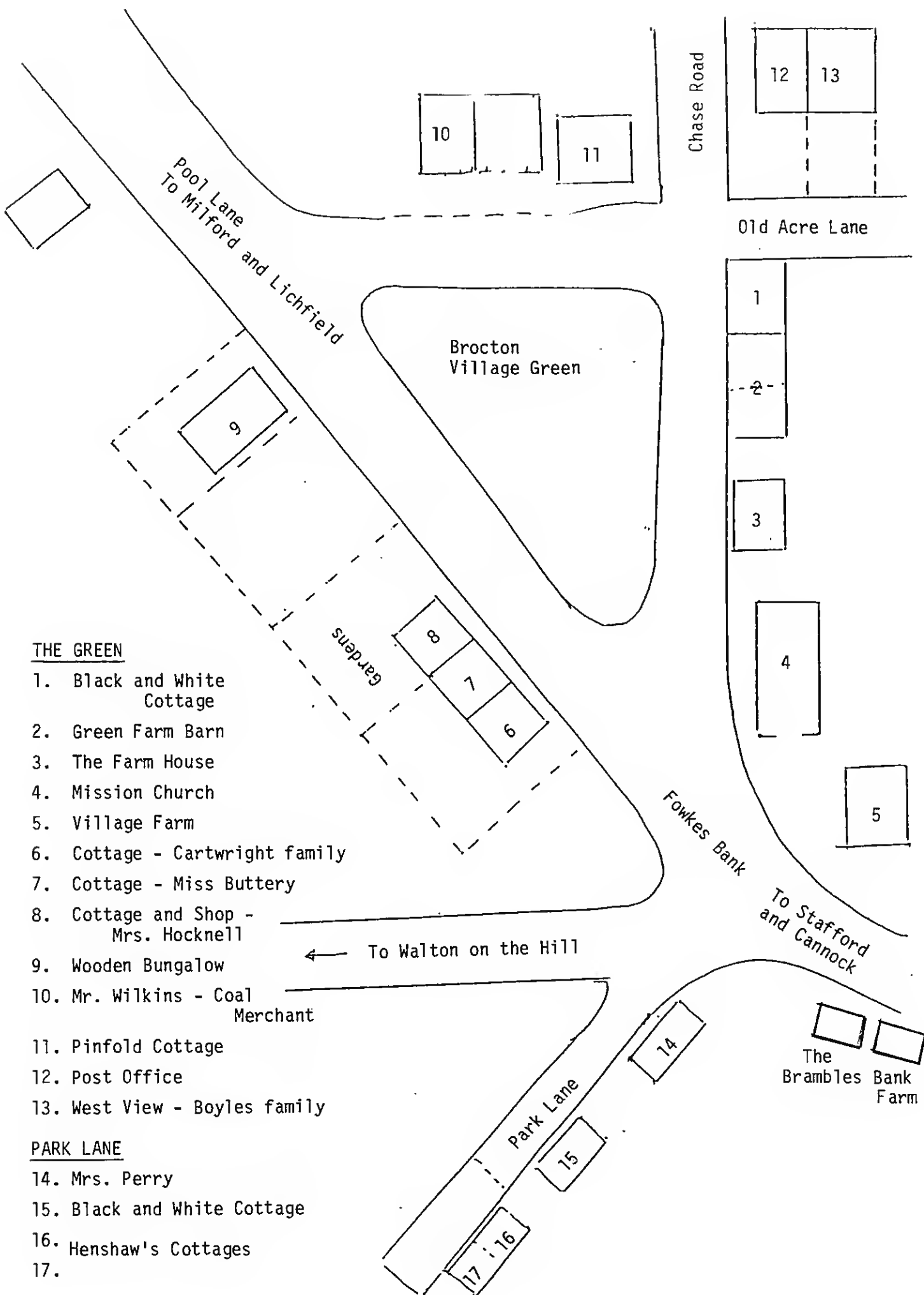
Mr. & Mrs. Buttery had three daughters, Ethel, the eldest was a teacher in the Channel Isles who later moved to Peterborough. Doris, also a teacher, lived at home and taught at St. John's School on the Weston Road in Stafford. When the various new schools opened after the war she transferred to Highfields School which was at that time housed in the Rising Brook High School building. The youngest daughter Jessie, before she married, worked at the Staffordshire Insurance Committee, the offices were in the Market Square, near to Bank Passage in Stafford.

This epistle has brought us to what the Milford Post Mistress once described as the "unholy end of Old Acre Lane". She lived on the main road at Milford and thought we were in the outback or the back of beyond. Perhaps she was right - it was a bit creepy trotting up the lane from the Village with all kinds of rustling and rattling from the various gardens, especially if you had forgotten the torch. I am sure there was no reference to the residents because she was speaking to my mother at the time.

So as we are both close to home, I am going to stop here.

Until I write again,

Yours,
Marjorie



THE GREEN

1. Black and White Cottage
2. Green Farm Barn
3. The Farm House
4. Mission Church
5. Village Farm
6. Cottage - Cartwright family
7. Cottage - Miss Buttery
8. Cottage and Shop - Mrs. Hocknell
9. Wooden Bungalow
10. Mr. Wilkins - Coal Merchant
11. Pinfold Cottage
12. Post Office
13. West View - Boyles family

PARK LANE

14. Mrs. Perry
15. Black and White Cottage
16. Henshaw's Cottages
- 17.

ROUND THE VILLAGE GREEN

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

First of all let me answer your question, "How did the Rustell family get in and out of their unusual bath?" I had wondered that myself. Yes, it was one of those cast iron baths, normally found squatting on Queen Anne legs in an unheated bathroom typical of that era. I consulted Ethel, my cousin, as she knew the family better than I did. Ethel and Dolly Austin (nee Rustell) established a casual friendship when Uncle first brought his family to Brocton, and it endured until Dolly's death a year or two ago. We both agree with the point you made, that it would have been impossible to step down into the bath from the hearth rug. The only way I can suggest would be to sit on the floor, swing your legs over the side and slide down feet first. None of the family were athletically inclined and Mrs. Rustell in particular would have found even the sitting on the floor bit difficult if not impossible. Without a stool or something in the bottom of the bath to step up on I don't see how they climbed out.

Jumping the gun a little, but while on the subject of baths, Ethel recalled the bath in the cottage they rented down Park Lane during the War. The cottage was unusual in that, although it was three stories high there was, apart from the back kitchen, only one room per floor - the living room on the ground floor, one bedroom on the first floor and a second one up on the second floor. Except for the top floor there was no privacy. It was necessary to cross the living room to reach the stairs and on the first floor the only way to the upper floor was through one corner of the bedroom. There was no space for a bathroom so the bath was situated in the kitchen alongside the sink. To avoid wasting space in the kitchen which was not all that wide, the bath was fitted with a cover and raised on blocks to lift it to worktop height. The bath was then much too high to step into in the usual way so a large stool or platform was provided. This was stored under the bath when not in use.

These rather bizarre arrangements were, I suppose, an improvement on the old galvanised bath on the hearth. At least they were fitted with a supply of cold water and a drainage pipe, but hot water still had to be carried from the source of heat and poured into the bath. No wonder the children were piled in together and when they were dried off and put to bed, more hot water was added to the tub for the adult members of the family.

I came to the reluctant conclusion many years ago that by the time you had put away all the paraphernalia attendant on bath time you were ready for another bath, especially in humid weather. It is easy to understand why one bath a week was considered sufficient and many people had to be content with a good wash down with a soapy "flannel".

Now that bit of nonsense is out of the way I will do what I intended to do at the start and that is to introduce you to the families who lived round the Village Green.

The Black and White Cottage and the Robinson's have already been mentioned as, although their address is The Green, the side entrance and the garden are on Old Acre Lane.

Working clockwise, a barn belonging to Green Farm came next. This has now been made into a flat, the home of Norah Shelley. Then came the gateway to the fold yard and the farmhouse itself. The farm was run by Billy Smallwood. There were at that time two other members of the Smallwood family farming in the village. Frank at the bottom of the Villa Bank on the Milford Road, and Fred who had a smallholding on Brook Lane. I am not sure of the relationship but I think Frank and Fred were brothers and Billy may well have been their nephew. Billy and his wife had an adopted son, an attractive little boy of about five years old. One morning on the school bus he sat behind me and I heard him ask Jim, Frank's youngest son, "Do you help your Oaddy newer rout?" Asked to repeat the question he did so. His companion still did not understand and the little boy said with a great deal of exasperation, "Do you help your Daddy muck out the cows". I presume Mum had forbidden the use of the word muck and insisted that it was referred to as manure. The cows in question when turned out after evening milking always cut straight across the Green on their way to their pasture on Pool Lane. Consequently the middle of the grass triangle was always more mud and manure than grass. It did not look as attractive as it does today.

In the late Autumn you would often find one or more flat haywagons loaded with heather standing on The Green waiting to be moved to Milford Station, their load destined for the Potteries. The heather, I was told, was used for packing China to help prevent breakages in transit. It never seemed ideal packing material to me, not for fine China anyway.

Next to the farmhouse was the Mission Room, or Mission Church. It was not known as All Saints until years later. It was a very basic building in those days. Chairs with hymn book racks along the back rails were provided in the place of pews. I remember with some embarrassment one Sunday morning having been kept overlong on my knees, I felt myself going faint. The next thing I remember was being carried out by Miss Loui (Louise probably) Joyce and another lady whose name escapes me. Two rows of chairs had been moved and I was set on my feet on the pathway. "Sit down on the step", instructed Miss Joyce. "No, I am alright", I replied, thinking of my new light coloured camel coat. The next thing I knew I came to lying full length on the brick path. After that the two ladies stood no more nonsense and I was escorted home. I was by this time fourteen or fifteen and my mother had been quite ill so it was concluded I had been overdoing things. It was not called stress in those days.

The Church was well used. Miss Tagg walked along the old lane from Walton to conduct Sunday school at 10.00 a.m. This was followed by morning service at 11.00 a.m. Questions were asked if you were present at Sunday School but absent from matins. There was no afternoon service, but Evensong was at 6.30 p.m. The congregation did not fill the Church except on special festival days, but there was a faithful following so you did not feel you were singing solo. A good thing in my case as I do not sing tunelessly.

The Village Farm is not strictly speaking on The Green, but it is next to the Church. Bob Cartwright ran the farm along with his mother and sister. I will ask Ethel if she can remember her name. There was a second sister but she was not living at the farm, I think she was married.



Brocton Village Green with Green Farm on the left with its barn.
 Next to the barn is Brocton Mission Church.
 The big house in the distance is The Brambles.
 On the opposite side of the road is a row of terraced cottages.
 Mrs. Hocknell ran the village shop from the end cottage.



Another view of Brocton Village Green.
 On the right is Brocton Mission Church with Green Farm Barn next to it.
 Pinfold Cottage can be seen in the middle background.

The property was part of the Milford Hall Estate I believe. The only time I remember seeing any of the family was at a "do" in the Institute on New Year's Eve. Bob made a regular appearance year after year at the New Year's Eve social. He and a crowd of very merry cronies used to put in a noisy appearance at about 10.30 p.m. It was just enough time to have walked round from the Chetwynd Arms Pub after closing time which was 10.00 p.m. then. They were very flushed and ready and willing to see the New Year in with anyone too slow to evade them.

Crossing the road from the Village Farm and heading back towards The Green there was, and still is, a little terrace of three houses, or cottages would be more accurate. The first one was occupied by the Cartwright family. There was Mr. and Mrs. Cartwright, their children Marjorie and Geoffrey, Mrs. Cartwright's father and brother, so there was not much spare room. Marjorie still lives in the cottage. I remember on one of the few Sunday School outings I attended we lost Geoffrey. Marjorie became worried because when we were called to tea she could not find her young brother. All of us were shepherded back to the station leaving several adults behind to hunt for Geoffrey. When we got to the station a very subdued Geoffrey was waiting for us. He had been intent on watching something and not heard the call to tea. No-one realised this and suddenly everyone he knew had disappeared. Some well-intentioned people befriended him and when they heard he had arrived by train they thought it best to take him to the station. Poor Geoffrey must have had a long tedious wait besides missing his tea. Marjorie too was no doubt worried as to what her mother would say if she arrived home having lost her little brother.

The middle cottage of the three was occupied by Miss Buttery. She had a post as housekeeper in Stafford and until her retirement some years later she only used the cottage in her off duty time so she did not have a lot of time to take part in village life.

The last of the cottages was the home of Mrs. Hocknell and her two daughters Bertha and Lucy. It was also the Village Shop. The shop was well stocked and sold most everyday commodities, bread, butter, bacon, matches, candles, paraffin, sweets, cigarettes and biscuits could all be purchased there. The prices were a little higher than in Stafford in some cases but you did not have to pay bus fare, ninepence return in those days, and I mean the pre-decimal type of pence. I remember soon after we moved to Bank Farm, Mother sending me to the shop for 7 lbs. of flour. Mrs. Hocknell slapped a small pre-packed bag down on the counter and said sarcastically, "You will have to forget your Yorkshire ways, this is the only size we sell." It was one pound and three quarters, or one pound twelve ounces. There was no suggestion that I take more than one bag, but when I reported back to Mother she promptly turned me about and sent me back for another three bags. At nine years old I was not into the multiplication of fractions, not as mental arithmetic, so did not realise that four times one and three quarter pounds equalled the seven pounds my mother wanted. In our Yorkshire village the small corner shop would have produced a large strong paper bag, scooped the flour from a bin, folded in the top of the bag and sent you on your way with a smile of thanks. Future bags of flour were ordered from Liptons in Stafford and delivered to the door along with most other staple commodities.

Another memory of about the same time concerned me and a friend who was staying with us. Doris and I both had been given tuppence for sweets. It was getting near closing time and we stood outside the shop peering through the window between the adverts trying to see what tempted us.



Mrs. Hocknell who ran Brocton village shop
and didn't approve of our Yorkshire ways.

I knew from experience that it paid to make up your mind before entering the shop so as not to waste Mrs. Hocknell's time while you dithered between two ounces of caramels for one penny or an equal quantity of boiled sweets. Chocolate at tuppence an ounce was best left until some generous adult felt like treating you. Before we had finished our deliberations another customer went into the shop and left again almost before the doorbell stopped jangling. We then entered to make our purchases but before being served we were told in no uncertain terms how inconsiderate we were. While we loitered over our choice of sweets Mrs. Hocknell had gone back into her living room and sat down by the fire. If she had known we intended going into the shop, she said, she would have waited; instead, she had had to get to her feet again and walk back into the shop, all for fourpence. I felt rather resentful, everything she said was true but I am sure, had an adult gone in for a packet of five Woodbine cigarettes worth tuppence, she would not have complained. It was near the end of the day and she was no doubt tired, but it still seemed unfair. Our ways may have been funny but a child with only a halfpenny to spend would have been a welcome customer in Yorkshire.

Bertha Hocknell, the elder of the two daughters, worked at the English Electric as it was then. I think I am correct in saying that she was in the tracing office. This was where "blue print" drawings of machinery were copied by a band of skilled tracers. If you have never seen a "blue print" I am not knowledgeable enough to explain in detail, but it was a photographic process which printed white outlines on a sensitive blue paper. The purpose was to show details of how machinery worked or had to be assembled. The draftsmen made the original drawings and tracers made copies. Presumably it was cheaper to employ a tracer than a draftsman. Even so, it was a skilled, well paid job. I imagine it to be an obsolete process today in a world of ever-changing computer programmes.

Lucy, the younger of the Hocknell sisters, worked in Stafford at the Staffordshire Insurance Committee office in the Market Square. She married before we had been in Brocton long and they had one son, John. I have heard you mention Sue Hodgins on several occasions and it is Sue's husband John who is Mrs. Hocknell's grandson. John and Sue's house, "Chartwell", appears to me to be built on the plot of land which used to be his grandmother's garden. The gardens of the three old cottages were wider than the cottages themselves, presumably to let the occupants grow plenty of vegetables to feed the family. Consequently Mrs. Hocknell's garden was not directly behind the shop but offset to the right, as you stand facing the property. It was quite a sizeable garden, especially when compared to that of the wooden bungalow next door.

The bungalow, Avondale, was the home of Mrs. Slater and her daughter Kathleen. It had as I am sure you have guessed, started life as another Army hut. There was very little garden and the bungalow which stands end-on to the road always appears to be wedged in. There is no garden at the back at all, just a bit of paved yard. Mrs. Slater and her daughter did not seem to take much interest in village life and it was not very long before they moved to Stafford. They lived in one of the Council houses at the bottom of Riverway. The living conditions must have been a great improvement on those at Avondale, hot water on tap, a bathroom and mains drainage, to mention just a few. Mrs. Slater must have had doubts about leaving Brocton because she told Ethel that she did not wish to sell the bungalow as she might want to come back one day.

Ethel and Len Cooper were looking for a less expensive place to rent so they became Mrs. Slater's tenants and they lived at the bungalow until the War started. Ethel's eldest son Jim was born there but when war was declared none of us knew quite what to expect and the wooden bungalow did not seem to offer much protection should there have been any enemy action over this area. As things turned out we were very lucky and the nearest we came to being in danger from the enemy was the night a German plane jettisoned two or three bombs in the fields on the far side of the A34 between here and Bednall. In a wooden structure fire would have been a great hazard for one thing so Ethel and Len started looking round for a better house.

When I started this project I did not foresee it becoming a guide book to inconvenient conveniences and unusual bathrooms. There was nothing unusual about the bathroom, it simply did not exist. You took your choice between the wash-house across the yard in Summer and the back kitchen in Winter. In either case it was a "bale out" job when you had finished. Nothing unusual in that in that day and age, but the toilet left much to be desired. It comprised a large funnel shaped contraption which, after use, had to be flushed by the simple expedient of sloshing a bucket of water down the funnel. Simple that is, when you have fetched your bucket of water. This I imagine came from the wash-house tap, but where did it go? you are going to ask. I did myself and the answer was, "Down Bob Cartwright's field." I presume there was a drain of sorts but I was afraid to ask as I knew Bob's cows occupied the field overnight. I was rather relieved that we had our milk from Jack Perry's herd. Let's not pursue the subject. Those town bred children who wanted their milk from nice clean bottles, not dirty old cows, have my sympathy.

Ethel and Len managed at this point to get the tenancy of one of two cottages at the bottom of Park Lane. These were really tied cottages belonging to Mr. Henshaw but one was available to rent due to the war time call up of men over eighteen who were not on essential jobs - essential that is to the war effort.

Ron and Joan Martin were the next to occupy the bungalow and for a time Joan's sister and her husband, Ada and Edgar Bott, lived there too. Joan and Ron are still at the bungalow and no doubt there have been alterations and improvements but it says something for the original timber that it is still habitable today.

Across the road on the opposite side of Pool Lane was the home of Mr. Wilkins, the local coal merchant. The coal lorry was housed in a garage built on to the house. There was only one child, John, but Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins brought up Mrs. Wilkins' niece Dolly who was still only a baby when her mother died. Although Dolly and I were quite good friends and she always spoke of Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins as Auntie and Uncle one tended to think of them as her mother and father and I am sure she was regarded as a daughter. She was known as Dolly Wilkins and no-one stopped to think that Wilkins was not her actual name.

Over the garden hedge from the Wilkins' home at Pinfold Cottage lived Mr. and Mrs. Harry Slinn. I have already mentioned Mr. Slinn when writing about the time we lived at Rose Cottage. Mrs. Slinn was a lively old lady with a very infectious laugh. She loved a gossip and could often be seen at the side gate which looked over the Green. I am sure she waited just inside the kitchen so that she could waylay anyone passing in the hope of a chat. She always seemed to have a teacloth in her hands and she used to wind it round her arms as she talked and giggled.



Ron and Joan Martin's house opposite The Green, Brocton.
It started life as an Officers' Hut
on The Chase during the First World War.



In my childhood Mr. Wilkins the Coal Merchant lived
in this house by Brocton Village Green.

When we first came to Brocton the Slinn's home, Pinfold Cottage, was still thatched as were the two cottages halfway along Old Acre Lane. The Black and White timbered cottage belonging to the Robinsons had been tiled. You could see where the walls had been raised to accommodate the new roof. This would provide more head-room in the bedrooms but I wonder if the pitch of the old thatched roof was too steep for tiles? Thatch would need a steep slope to shed rainwater whereas the rain would slide easily down the tiles, but the tiles would be less likely to slip on a less steep incline.

In the early 1930's quite a few Brocton residents let rooms or offered board and lodgings in the Summer. When I first joined the staff of the School of Art as it was known in those days, a colleague told me he used to spend his Summer holidays at Pinfold Cottage with the Slinns. He only lived in Stafford which as towns go was a pleasant place, but imagine the change, had you happened to live on the outskirts of Wolverhampton or Birmingham or in the Black Country.

The Yorkshire village where I was born was not unpleasant. There were blue-bell woods and field paths and walks alongside the River Rother which were accessible to the public but everything was so dirty and the river, before it reached Catcliffe, had received more than its fair share of effluent from the steelworks and foundries.

Old Acre Valley with its brook of clear water flowing over a bed of smooth pebbles was almost better than the seaside. Sherbrook Valley was even more attractive with its low slung silver birch trees just waiting to be climbed. Then there was the Chase with its bracken and heather and, if you knew where to look, wild fruits such as bilberries, blackberries, cranberries, sloes and crab apples. I can quite understand the attraction of spending a week or two at Brocton.

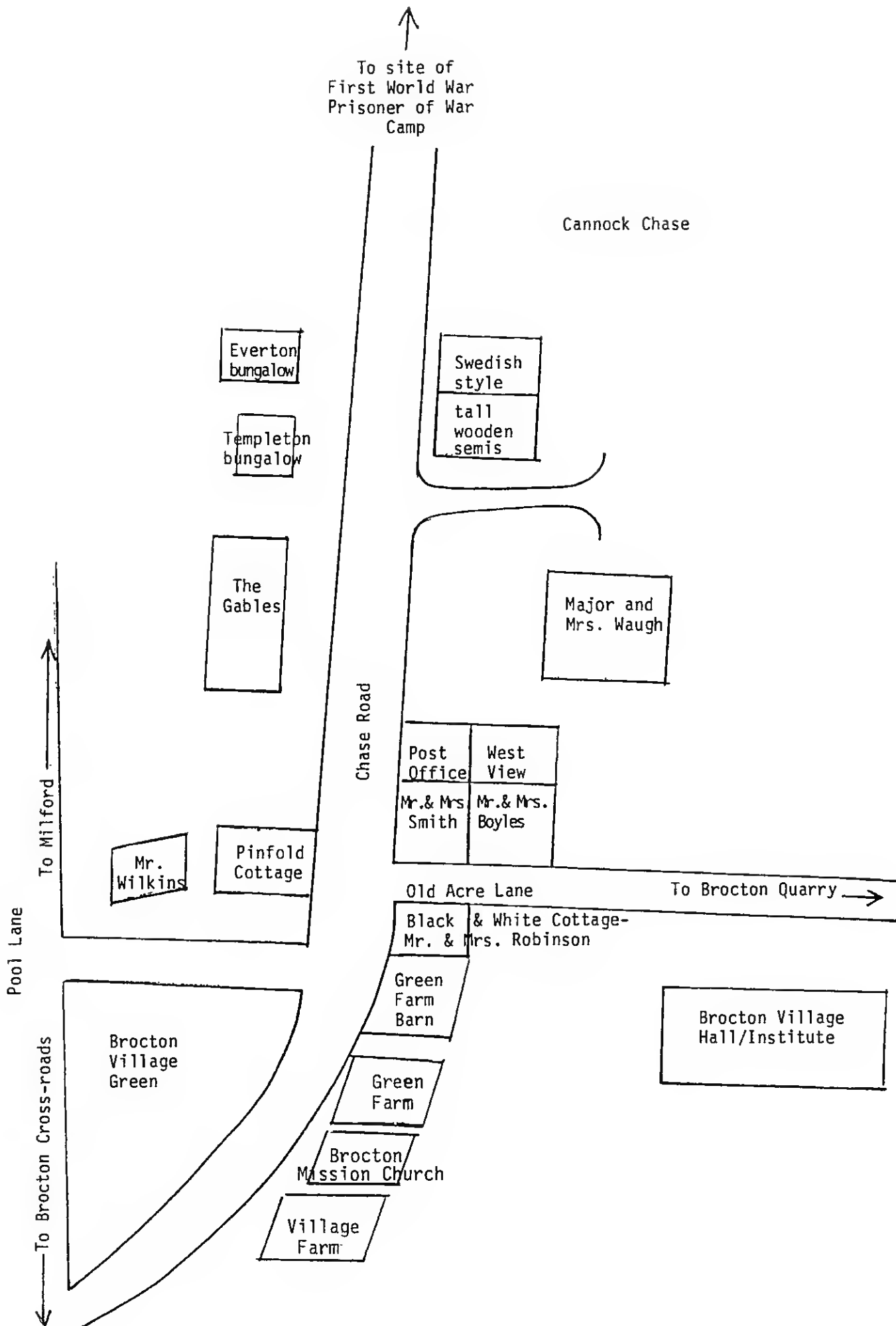
That tour around The Green has taken longer than I anticipated but it has brought us neatly to the junction of Chase Road and Old Acre Lane.

Although quite a little colony of people lived up Chase Road, I did not know very many of them, so that little sortie should not take long.

I will try and write again soon.

Regards,

Marjorie



UP CHASE ROAD

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

It will only be a short letter this time because in the 1930's there were not many houses up Chase Road and I have only vague memories of some of the families who lived there.

The first house on the right hand side as you started to climb the hill was the Post Office (now the Old Post Office) which has already been mentioned because the house with the garden formed the corner between Old Acre Lane and Chase Road. Mrs. Smith ran the Post Office and the letter box was set into the house wall. She also stocked a few non-perishable food stuffs, sweets, chocolate, cake, biscuits, picture post cards of the surrounding area, etc.

The next house above the Post Office was, or is, set so far back as to be almost hidden from view. Major and Mrs. Waugh lived there in post-war years when Mrs. Waugh organised a very successful Dramatic Society for the village. I don't think I ever knew who lived there before the War and my usual sources of reference have let me down on this one. According to Major Waugh everything which was satisfactory was "Tickettyboo". I wonder if there is any connection with "Just the ticket"? I think the Major had served in India, so it could be Army slang.

A pair of unusual houses were next in line. Tall, narrow and built of wood, I have heard them variously described as Swedish, Swiss and Austrian style of houses. You take your choice, I am not prepared to put my head on the block, but if I had to choose I should opt for Swedish. They were at that time the last houses on that side of Chase Road and whether the style of building appealed to you or not they always seemed out of place on the edge of Cannock Chase.

On the opposite side of the road there was only one rather large residence, The Gables. It was pleasantly situated on high ground so did not seem hemmed in like the houses on the opposite side of the road. It was quite a climb from the gate to the front door, not that I was on social terms with the family, more likely collecting rummage. I have a strong feeling that the occupant was a lone female, but I can't find any confirmation of that. Most people quote Dr. Wilson or Dr. Lowe when I come out with my opening gambit, "Can you remember who?".

Some little distance beyond the crest of Chase Road was a little colony of homes. There was a brick built bungalow which in post-war years was occupied by Miss Templeton, (Elsie) and her sister Jan. I got to know them both quite well when we all travelled to and from work by bus.

Whether the bungalow was in the family before the war I am not sure but I seem to remember the name plate Templeton's on the gate.

Miss Everton lived next door and I remember the garden always looked as if the lawn had been recently cut and in Spring there were masses of daffodils. Miss Everton was the owner of the three Stafford cinemas - The Picture House in Bridge Street, The Albert Hall in Crabbery Street, a small place for such an imposing name, and the Sandonia on the Sandon Road. Miss Everton was Aunt to Jake Whitehouse who until recently lived just down the lane from us at the bungalow, "Halfacre". The number of times I have written the word bungalow recently is surprising. Bungalows must outnumber houses at the rate of two to one, or so it seems.

Templeton's and Everton's were the two more conventional dwellings in the group but there were a number of other families with homes of various kinds. Not many of them offered much in the way of "mod cons" but I can only remember one in any detail. That was the one where Harry Revill and his wife Stella lived for a time when their first son, Terry, was only a baby. The detail I remember, as you no doubt can guess, was related to the bathroom - it was built under the house. There was no access from the house and you had to go outside and down some steps to gain entrance. I bet not many people took a late night bath in winter. I can't remember if there was hot water on tap but there was certainly no central heating and if it was anything like Old Acre Lane the water pressure was very poor. I remember Les Smith from the Post Office once complaining that if anyone else nearby turned on their tap while you were cleaning your teeth, you were left foaming at the mouth. If it was like that at the bottom of the hill what was it like at the top?

One other little item of interest was on The Chase where it flattens out beyond the crest of Chase Road. During the First World War when there was the Prisoner of War camp up there, the prisoners made a model in cement of one of the battle areas in France. When I remember the model was badly overgrown and rather broken up but it was still possible to trace the lines of the trenches etc. An elderly gentleman with a bushy white beard seemed to have taken it upon himself to rebuild the model but, although a lot seemed to be dug out, not much was rebuilt. I remember him, Mr. Groucott, there on Summer weekends with a bucket conspicuously displayed, asking for donations to buy cement for rebuilding the model. I don't think many people had faith in his ability to do the work, they certainly did not give all that generously and there was very little evidence of work in progress.

There is no point in going further unless you want a walk on the Chase, so we will cut across the top and down the hillside into Old Acre Lane and home.

All for now,

Yours,

Marjorie



Aunt Annie Revill, Uncle Bill's wife,
Mother to Ethel Cooper.

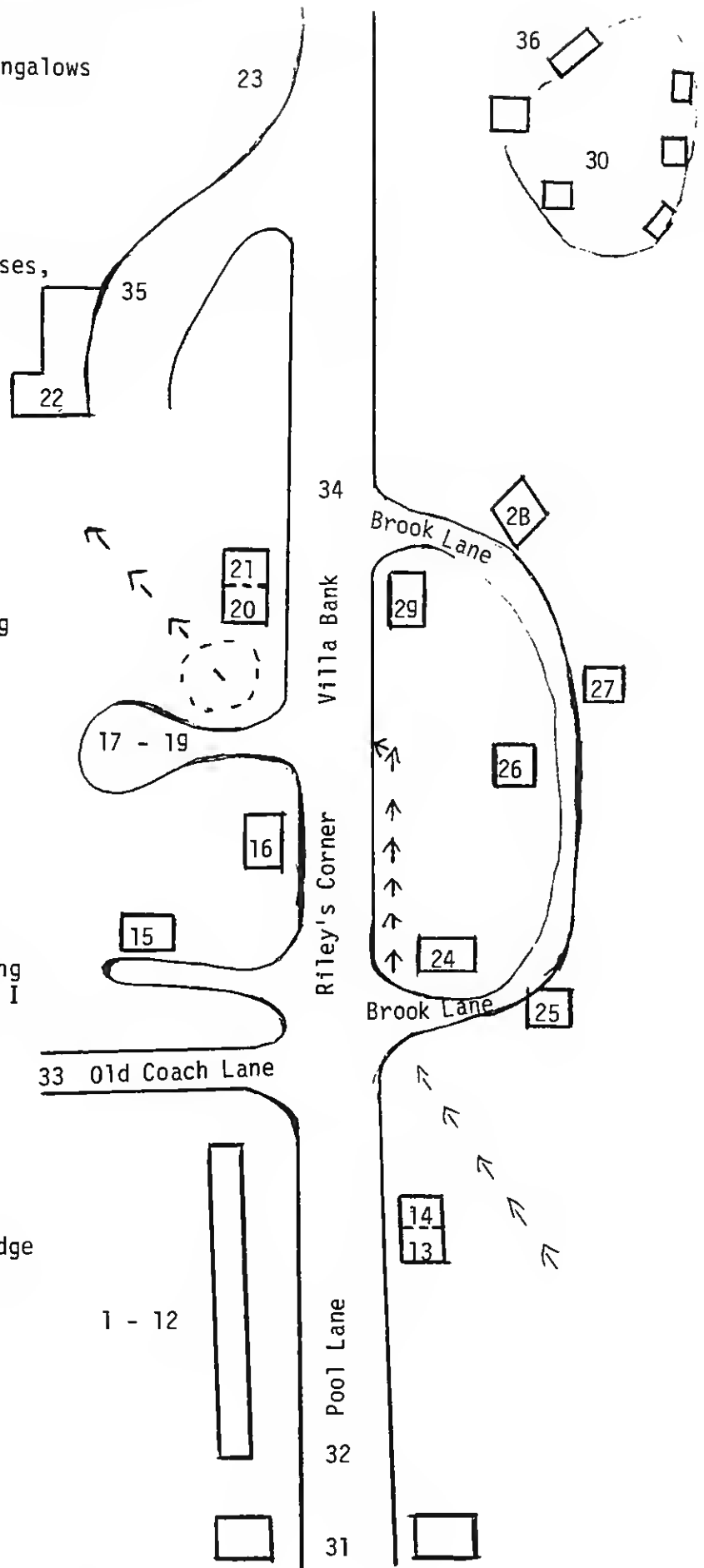
BROCTON IN THE 1930's

POOL LANE

- 1-12 Detached house, pair of semi-detached and nine bungalows
- 13 Rogers
- 14 Edwards/Tillots
- 15 Brocton Leys
- 16 Rose Cottage
- 17 Private road to three houses, Jennings,
- 18 Henshaws, and
- 19 Todds
- 20 Estate houses, and
- 21 Laundry, Brocton Lodge
- 22 Brocton Lodge (or Villa)
- 23 Gate Keeper's Lodge

BROOK LANE

- 24 Brook House, Small-holding
 - 25 Mrs. Morgan
 - 26 The Beesoms
 - 27 Stone Cottage
 - 28 Mr. Marshall
 - 29 Farm, Frank Smallwood
 - 30 A cluster of houses and cottages built around a little dell or hollow. Not strictly speaking in Brocton but too interesting to be left out. They are I think classed as being in Milford.
 - 31 The Green
 - 32 Pool Lane
 - 33 Old Coach Lane
 - 34 Villa Bank
 - 35 Private Drive, Brocton Lodge
- Brook →
- Pool -----
- 36 Ice Cream Pavilion



ALONG POOL LANE

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

I promised you a longer letter this time and my word it goes on for ever and ever, I did not think there was so much of interest along Pool Lane.

Starting out from the Village Green and travelling along Pool Lane towards Milford there were a few houses and a few bungalows on the left hand side.

The first one, a detached house, was the property of Mr. and Mrs. Lees who had a cabinet making and joinery business on Crooked Bridge Road in Stafford. The move to Brocton to live was no doubt their first step toward retirement.

Next to the Lees's was a pair of semi-detached houses and I cannot recall anything at all about the family in the first one.

Mr. and Mrs. France lived next door when I first remember it. They had two children, a son and a daughter. They moved away and it was not until years later that I met up again with Sheila, the daughter, when we were both students, then part-time craft teachers at the School of Art. Mrs. Mager and her son Bill were the next occupants and when Bill married, his wife joined the household. Although we lived only about five minutes walk apart I don't think I met up with Bill until the end of the War. I had been a lathe operator in the Tank shop at the English Electric but had always been stationed at the old Dorman Factory on Foregate, whereas Bill Mager was employed at the main works on Lichfield Road. It was only when the war was drawing to a close and the Tank Shop personnel were being transferred to other departments that we met up on the night shift in twenty-two shop. Bill was a large gentleman and the men used to tease him by referring to his boiler suit as his rompers. I was released from War work shortly afterwards and returned to clerical work. It was a Government ruling that if the firm you were working for when you were called up wanted you back, then back you had to go.

Next to the semi-detached houses was a row of bungalows. The first one belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Moss. They only used it at weekends and holiday time because Mrs. Moss was still employed as housekeeper at the Judge's House in Martin Street. They moved to Brocton when Mrs. Moss retired.

The second bungalow was named "The Woodlands" and Uncle Bill and his family lived there. It was a nice house and Ethel and Len would have preferred to stay there after my Uncle died, but it was simply a question of economics.

Harvey and May White were next at The Woodlands. Harvey's family had the Newsagents business at Milford, now the White House Stores. They delivered papers over a wide area and May covered this particular area. She was a chain smoker and liked her glass of beer. She always had her dog, a Jack Russell, in the car with her and she and Harvey used to aim to finish their respective rounds in time to meet up for lunch at the Chetwynd Arms. If you lived in Old Acre Lane you were lucky if your paper arrived by 10.00 o'clock.

Next door at Braeside lived Bert Lees and his wife. Bert who had trained in woodwork like his father eventually became a woodwork teacher and after the War they moved to Yorkshire. Mrs. Lees and Mrs. France used, I am told, to carry on a conversation with one another across the two intervening gardens. Do I mean conversation, or shouting match? At least they could not be accused of being secretive.

"Innisfree" was the name of the fourth bungalow and Miss Shingler and her niece, also Miss Shingler, lived there. There was a veranda running across the front of the bungalow and this was fitted with wooden shutters. These were always closed in the winter months. It may have made the place warmer but it must have been dark and gloomy. Miss Shingler senior kept herself to herself, almost to the point of being a recluse but her niece, although she shared her aunt's seclusion at home, could be quite sociable. She did not often travel on the morning bus but when she did she would join in the conversation at the bus stop. I cannot recall what happened to either of them but a few years ago the bungalow underwent far-reaching alterations. Since then it has been demolished and two bungalows fitted onto the site.

The next bungalow, "Ystrad", was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wallace. The only thing I can remember was that Mrs. Wallace was very deaf but she would still engage in conversation if she saw you passing. When the Smiths retired from the Post Office they acquired "Ystrad". Of the next three bungalows and their occupants I can tell you very little. Two of them had a shared driveway, probably because the frontage of the site was too narrow to allow two separate drives. In one of the three, (but which one?) lived Mrs. Barton-Land. Stella Antill, who later married my cousin Harry Revill, was in service with Mrs. Barton-Land.

The last bungalow, and at that time the last dwelling before Old Coach Road, was the home of Alderman Miller and his family. I have only vague memories of the Alderman and until you looked it up for me the other day I was equally vague as to what an Alderman was exactly. He was very proud of his title and expected to be addressed by it. As I remember him he was rather overweight and of a peppery disposition. Mrs. Miller on the other hand was tall and elegant with wavy, white hair. There were two daughters, Peggy the younger one was at boarding school and the organisation of the household appeared to be in the capable hands of Miss Miller, Ivy. After her parents died, Miss Miller continued to live at the family home and I am sure she worked at the Children's Day Nursery in Stafford. She was an active member of the Dramatic Society and of the Women's Institute.

On the right hand side of Pool Lane between Mr. Wilkins and the turn-off for Brook Lane were only two houses. They were quite a bit older than the properties on the other side of the road. They may have been tied cottages. In the one nearer to The Green I can recall two families but I cannot put dates to names, especially as early as 1934. Mr. and Mrs. Lambert, Bryn and Doris, with their son Dennis lived there for a time. Dennis would be about my age, perhaps a little younger, and we used to meet up at Village Dances and Socials. Although I lost touch with Dennis after he and Noreen Garner from Bednall married and moved away from Brocton, his parents continued to live in the village. They lived for a number of years down Park Lane in the house Ethel and Len occupied. I often saw Mr. Lambert about with his little Cairn Terrier.

The next family in the house on Pool Lane was Mr. and Mrs. Rogers and the twins Jean and John. I remember them in particular for their skill at Whist. The whole family were keen players and although Jean and John would only be about 12 years old at the time they were excellent players and could hold their own with ease.

The house next door was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Edwards, their daughter Lily and her husband and son, Kenneth Tillet (I am not sure of the spelling). Mrs. Edwards lived to a ripe old age but although we lived only about half a mile apart for many years our paths rarely crossed.

A little further along Pool Lane a narrow unpaved road - Old Coach Lane - branches off to the left. This gives access to one or two of the big houses and if you survive the rough pebbled surface the Lane will lead you into Walton Lane. It always amused us that if you lived in Walton it was Brocton Lane, but if you lived in Brocton it was Walton Lane. Why didn't it change names half way? Close by the top of the Old Coach Lane was the entrance to Brocton Leys, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Riley at that time. I think the name of their Shoe Factory was Frederick Riley's but there was also C.H. Riley's and both were in the Marston Road area, so I may be confused. I mentioned the family when writing about Rose Cottage.

On the opposite side of Pool Lane another narrow lane branches off - this is Brook Lane. It swings round in a half moon shape to rejoin Pool Lane at the bottom of the Villa Bank, as that bit of the road to Milford used to be called. Interesting as it might be, I am not going to be side-tracked down or along Brook Lane until we have finished Pool Lane.

All the houses except one are on the left side of Pool Lane. As you rounded Riley's Corner the first one was the now familiar Rose Cottage. Immediately beyond Rose Cottage was the Private Road to three large houses, known in those days as Gentlemen's residences. The first one was on the right hand side, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jennings. Mr. Jennings was connected with or probably owned the firm R.T. Jennings, but I believe they were shoe factors rather than manufacturers. The distinction would have been lost on me anyway. The two daughters, Catherine and Hazel were both at the High School but whereas I was a scholarship girl, the Jennings sisters had, I am sure, come up through the Kindergarten, Green Hall. Catherine would be a year or two younger than I was so our paths at school rarely crossed.

Of the two other houses on this Private Road one was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Henshaw and the other one housed Captain and Mrs. Todd. There was some connection here with the Todds and Brocton Hall Golf Club, but I am not sure what this was exactly.

The next two houses were The Villas, which I imagine must be why the Villa Bank is so named. Incidentally, until we moved to Staffordshire I always thought a Bank was where you kept your money, if you had any, not a steep road. We should have used the word hill. We had a Brinsworth Hill and White Hill but now we learned to say Radford Bank, Villa Bank etc. The Villas were the property of Brocton Lodge and housed Estate workers. The Laundry was situated at the back of one of them and there was plenty of space for large drying greens. All the laundry from the "Big House" was done at home.

Brocton Lodge was in those days the home of Mrs. Platt. At certain times of the year she moved the whole household, lock stock and barrel, to Scotland for several months.

There was a large clock on one of the buildings in the Stableyard and it was reputed to be kept "five minutes fast" so that when the clock struck the hour the coachman could bring the coach round to the front entrance and still be on time to pick up the traveller on the hour. No-one explained how this worked if the coach was ordered for twenty minutes past ten, or a quarter to twelve, or if the coachman was not quite ready to set out. I expect he was never late because no doubt his job depended on punctuality.

At Rose Cottage we often heard the stable clock strike the hour. The back entrance to Brocton Lodge was just beyond The Villas; alongside the drive gate was a kissing gate to the footpath to Milford or to Walton via Jacob's Ladder. The main entrance, complete with Gate Keeper's Lodge and iron gates was quite some distance away, probably a quarter of a mile nearer to Milford.

I am not sure where the boundary between Milford and Brocton runs exactly but I think Mr. Wilfred Morgan's postal address was Brocton. Mr. Morgan lived in a somewhat secluded house tucked in behind the houses which bordered the main Brocton to Milford Road. Mr. Morgan was a member of Hand Morgan & Co., a firm of Solicitors with offices in the Market Square. He always travelled to work on the bus which left Brocton Green at 9.30 a.m. The bus drivers all knew him and stopped at his gate to pick him up although it was not an official stop. If Mr. Morgan was a bit late and could be seen coming up his drive then the bus waited for him.

Who am I to crib about this service? On a much more humble level, I was the only schoolgirl on the 8.20 a.m. bus. I had to be at the Oval for 8.45 a.m. but the Walton school children travelled a bit later. They had a shorter distance to travel and did not need to be at school until nine o'clock. The bus came out to Brocton along the A.34 and went back to Stafford via Milford and Walton. There were no houses bordering the right hand side of Sawpit Lane, so once I was past the bungalow where Charlie Tams now lives I could watch for the bus driving along Sawpit Lane towards The Green. Usually I did not cut it too fine, but provided I was not too heavily laden with books my long legs would get me to the bus stop on time. Sometimes, if I was a bit late, the conductor could be seen waving frantically at the end of Old Acre Lane and shouting to say they would wait provided I didn't take all day. Quite often I was the only passenger as far as Milford. Why they ran a bus at that particular time I can't understand; though it did fill up a bit it was never crowded.

As I was concentrating on the left hand side of the road to Milford I didn't want to break the sequence and because of this I omitted the farm of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Smallwood and his family. It was the last place on that side of the road and I think it was built of stone. It is several years now since it was demolished and I can still picture the shape and style of it but not the building material. We must talk to Jim someday if we see him about. There was quite a family of young Smallwoods. George and Ernest were about my age, one a little older and the other a bit younger I think. Then there was Brenda. She had to wear glasses to correct an eye problem. The specs must have been a worry to her as she always walked about with her head bent in an effort to look over the top of the frame of her glasses. I guess she would gladly have abandoned her spectacles with their stark steel rims and bother the consequences, but would no doubt have regretted it in later life. Jim was the youngest of the family until the arrival of his sister Cynthia. I remember Cynthia most clearly as a lively teenager when she was a member of the Youth Club. The boys all settled for work they knew something about. Ernest stayed with farming and George and Jim branched out into milk retailing. I am sure Jim will fill you in if you wish to know more about that branch of the Smallwood family.

One thing I remember is that provided you placed your order a day or two in advance you could obtain a rabbit from Mrs. Smallwood for a shilling. I hated being sent to fetch the dead body, I always felt so sorry for the poor rabbit. In actual fact the rabbit population was so great something had to be done to reduce numbers. They ate more vegetables than the family if they were not kept down.

That's all for now. I promise that we will explore Brook Lane and Brocton Hollow before long.

Best Wishes,

Marjorie

P.S. When writing about the last two houses on the left hand side of Pool Lane I mentioned that they were part of the Brocton Lodge Estate and that they were, I imagine, The Villas which gave rise to the name Villa Bank. That is not correct. On page 9B in the book "Down Memory Lane" I noticed the following -

"Brocton Lodge or Villa was built early in the last century" so it was the "big house" which was the Villa, not the Estate Workers' homes.



Ethel Cooper, nee Revill
Housemaid to Mr. and Mrs. Teasdale at Milford.



Brook House, Brook Lane, Brocton, now sadly no more.
Jessie Adams from Canada who married May Smallwood
is standing outside.

ROUND BROOK LANE

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

Now for Brook Lane. In those days the first house you came to as you walked along Brook Lane was on the left. It was Brook House, the small-holding of Mr. Alfred Smallwood. He was one of the brothers of Miss Elizabeth Smallwood who had her tea room in Old Acre Lane and whose garden was curtailed to accommodate our houses. I remember Mr. Smallwood quite well and when we lived at Rose Cottage I often used to see Mrs. Smallwood sitting by the open door of Brook House on warm evenings. You may wonder why Brook House and Brook Lane, but there was a brook nearby! On the opposite side of Pool Lane to Rose Cottage (Brocton Cottage as it is now named) there was quite a brisk little brook running in a concrete channel. I cannot recall the source of the brook but seem to remember it running past Brook House and under Brook Lane and past Rose Cottage before diving under Pool Lane to emerge in the field just below Mr. Jennings' house. Here it formed a pool before going on its way. Some years ago in the interests of road widening the brook was piped and the road made that much wider. In our days down there it was not unusual for two vehicles to scrape one another. I had completely forgotten about the brook until I started these letters. I had also forgotten that Brook House had a separate little annex. This was occupied for a short time by an elderly couple from the Bradford area of Yorkshire. The Smallwood family may have needed this extra accommodation themselves at times as there was quite a large family, four girls and two boys I think. I am acquainted with Margaret (most people referred to her as Maggie) and with Laura, who was Mrs. Howard Bailey and lived on Sawpit Lane. I always feel the word acquainted sounds a bit stand-offish, but living in a village you make quite a lot of friendly - well, acquaintanceships, yet to refer to them as friendships suggests a greater degree of intimacy. They are however a valued part of village life which is often missing from urban areas.

You will remember, I am sure, when not so long ago you took me to the hospital quite early one morning as I was to have an internal examination under anaesthetic. While I was waiting to be allocated a bed a patient came out of the shower and while speaking to a nurse she caught sight of me. As she came across to speak she said, "You come from the far end of Old Acre Lane don't you?" To which I replied, "And you are Maggie Smallwood's niece". Neither of us could on the spur of the moment think of the other's name but we were well enough acquainted to enjoy a short conversation (and exchange of symptoms).

This is what I mean about village life. I remembered my fellow-patient's Christian name quite quickly but Wendy had to remind me that her surname was now Wilton, not Smallwood.

I also remember the horse and trap and Mrs. Smallwood being taken for a ride. No, I don't mean in the modern sense, perhaps drive would be a better word. I expect it was the same horse which my friend's father used to hire for Eunice to ride.

Alas, Brook House was demolished some time ago and a modern house was built on the family land. The new house may not have the old world charm of Brook House but it must be more convenient. I think I would settle for the 'mod cons'. Wendy Wilton and her family live there along with her Aunt Margaret who, if my arithmetic is correct, will celebrate her ninetieth birthday this year, 1994.

After passing Brook House and its outbuildings the track turned sharp left and deteriorated somewhat. Just on the far corner was a pleasant old cottage occupied by Mrs. Maria Morgan. Mrs. Morgan and I were not best friends! She was a woman of impoverished means which was unfortunate as she had pretensions of grandeur. I do not want to sound uncharitable, but she really had some annoying ways. She had an exaggerated sense of her own importance and expected instant attention to her wants. She was also a great snob. How my mother became involved with her I shall never know, but I suppose Mrs. Morgan came over as a rather hard up, lonely old pensioner with whom it would be a kindness to spend an hour or two.

For some reason she would not draw her old age pension from Brocton Post Office but was registered at Milford where Mrs. Cook was Post Mistress. Remember Mrs. Cook and the unholy end of Old Acre Lane? Mrs. Morgan did not want Mrs. Smith or the Brocton people to know she was dependant on the 10/- a week State pension so she talked Mother into agreeing that I should cycle to Milford on Friday evening to collect the money. I was at the High School at the time and did not get home until about five o'clock. There was just time for a quick snack before getting on my bike and going round to collect Mrs. Morgan's pension book. The Milford Post Office in those days was just before you came to the Water Spout next to the house where Sir Peter Terry was shot and wounded by the I.R.A. The houses were so close together that it was difficult to tell that Mrs. Cook's was a separate house. Back on my bike and by now the custodian of a ten shilling note (fifty pence by today's values) it was a long lonely pull back to Brocton. Nothing but The Chase on one side and the big houses and their grounds on the other. No parent today would be happy for a twelve year old to do it but there was not quite the same danger then. Even so it was not pleasant when it got dusk early and my bicycle lamps were not of the brightest. I then delivered the book and money to their owner. If it was a wet night, or I did not feel like cycling, I would catch the bus. Provided everything went according to plan I could just race from the bus stop opposite Milford Common to the Post Office, grab the pension and get back to the stop to catch the next bus back. Miss that bus, the six o'clock from Stafford, and it meant walking home as the next bus did not leave town until 8.35. Mrs. Morgan did not expect to refund my fare, which was I believe a penny each way as I was under fourteen.

Mrs. Morgan used to boast to Mother about the stately homes she had stayed at and the welcome she always received. She would describe the food and the occasion and the house guests and usually ended up with, "And I had my ti-rah-ra on." We never saw this tiara but it was not long before we realised that all these hi-jinks were in the servants hall, courtesy of the housekeeper, and probably when the family were away.

She would have liked to get Dad involved as well, either digging the garden or doing some odd jobs, but as Dad did not enjoy gardening and was not a do-it-yourself enthusiast she was on a losing wicket from the start. Once when it was coming up to Quarter Day and the Shugborough Estate Agent was due to collect three months rent Mrs. Morgan had not enough put by to pay her dues. The rent was only a shilling or two a week but when your only income is the state pension a quarter's rent would have to be budgeted for.

She tried to borrow the rent money from Mother rather than admit that she could not pay. She was onto another loser there alright because Mum's motto in life was, "Neither a lender nor borrower be," - what you could not pay cash for you managed without until you could. A good policy, I agree, but it could be too rigidly applied. In spite of the Head Mistress's recommendations to the contrary Mother refused to let me borrow from the High School's Scholarship and Loan Fund so that I could stay on at school another year. She took me out of school before my sixteenth birthday, thus denying me the opportunity of sitting for the School Certificate as G.C.E. was then known. In justification it is only fair to say that Mother had been ill. There were doctor's bills to pay and she needed help at home which I could give free of charge. It was a short-sighted move as we were not down to our last shilling and come the September she enrolled me at a small commercial college which she thought was a golden opportunity and which I disliked intensely. I wanted to be a teacher, not a clerk. I think Mum always resented the fact that had we stayed in Yorkshire my scholarship would have entitled me to a free place at the local grammar school with books and free travel, whereas in Staffordshire fees were means-tested and unless you were very poor you paid your bus fare and bought the necessary text books (always second-hand through the school). The bus fare was, incidentally, 4½d. return. With this firm attitude towards borrowing and debt, Mrs. Morgan did not have any chance of a loan towards her rent. Anyway Mother was of the firm opinion that the Earl of Lichfield, hard up as he was reputed to be, was better able to stand out of his rent money than she was.

When Mrs. Morgan died the family who had looked after her during her last illness asked us to go and see if there were any of the old lady's bits and pieces we would like to buy as they were trying to raise enough to cover funeral expenses. There are some odd wine glasses and a rather nice pink dish still about. You have, I am sure, seen most of them but I may not have identified them.

Mrs. Morgan used to make me cross because she used to report that she had seen me walk along Brook Lane with some friends but I had not had the courtesy to call and introduce them to her. I don't think my friends would have appreciated it. Fortunately I saw the funny side of things when on one occasion I had been asked to deliver something to her when I was going for a walk with a friend. She told Mum I was not nearly as pretty as my friend. It was probably true, but hardly tactful. Let's say ti-rah-ra to Mrs. M and get on our way!

The next house beyond Mrs. Morgan's and on the same side of Brook Lane was Stone Cottage, the home of the Groucott family. If I knew Mr. Groucott I have not retained a clear picture of him, but I always enjoyed an encounter with Mrs. Clara Groucott. There were three children. Stanley, who would be near my age, was unfortunately killed during the War and his mother found it hard to believe that he would not be coming back. I remember Stanley best from the Saturday night dances at the Village Institute. Barbara and I have not met up for quite some time but considering how rarely I go out that is hardly surprising. Leslie being that much younger I only remember as a school boy.

Across the road from Stone Cottage was The Beesoms, a large house or gentleman's residence is a description which would have been used in the pre-war era. The house was, still is for that matter, surrounded by a high hedge mainly of holly. This had been allowed to grow up at intervals and then clipped into bushy shapes. These were said to be the besoms which gave the house its name. They were far too rounded to resemble the sort of besom used for sweeping up garden rubbish, they were more like the chimney sweep's brushes. A Mr. and Mrs. Gibson lived there but I only recalled the name after Ethel prompted me.

I do however remember Miss Mollie Elly who came to The Beesoms next. She was a pleasant woman, very interested in village life. She had a companion/ housekeeper who lived in. Unfortunately she fell and broke her arm and while she was recuperating Miss Elly took her own life. She seemed such an unlikely person to do that so one can only presume she had worries no-one knew about. When the furniture and effects were auctioned off Mother bid for some books for me. I was a Rudyard Kipling fan at the time. I can't remember the exact price but it was only shillings for several nicely bound volumes. A school friend's mother came across to me as I paid for the books and criticized us for paying so much for second-hand books and suggested that we had wrongly thought they were first editions. One had only to open the front cover and read the reprint dates to know they were nothing of the sort. It was no business of hers what we paid! I must have a look through the books, I haven't really read any of them for ages. One of them is signed Mollie Elly and I remember Miss Elly saying she would have appreciated a baptismal name with fewer L's in it to go with Elly.

It would be a few years later when Mr. Knot, the headmaster of the Grammar School came to live at The Beesoms but he changed the name to Galleon's Lap, an even more fanciful name. Fortunately the next occupant changed it back to The Beesoms.

Before we move on I would just like to make it clear that it was the housekeeper who had the misfortune to break her arm, not Miss Elly. I can recall the lady quite clearly but can't remember her name. She stayed with the Rustel family in Old Acre Lane while her arm was in plaster. She was very distressed by her employer's death, not entirely for selfish reasons, but she had lost both her home and her employment. She was, I am sure, very fond of Miss Elly and felt that had she not been incapacitated the tragedy would not have happened.

Some little distance beyond The Beesoms the track which is all Brook Lane was at this point, swings left again. This last leg brings you back to Pool Lane but just before we meet the road there was a rather secluded house. Mr. Marshall, Laura Richardson's grandfather, lived there. When we lived at Bank Farm I used to be despatched down to Mr. Marshall's with a basket of something, food usually, for the old gentleman. Such a trip was usually worth a toffee or two. After Mr. Marshall died the house was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Roberts. They hoped to be able to demolish the old house and build on the site but they could not get planning permission and had to be content with modernising and extending the old house. It was well done and made a very nice house when finished. I can't remember the original name of the house but Mrs. Roberts named it Hollywood Slade. I immediately thought of Hollywood, U.S.A. and it didn't seem to fit. After I asked you to check to see if subsequent owners had kept the name I looked up Slade in the dictionary and it gives the definition, "a little valley or dell, a piece of low moist ground". I don't know about moist but the other fits and there were holly bushes in the garden at that time, so when you rephrase it and say Holly Wood Slade it makes sense.

From the end of Brook Lane I had intended to scramble (not physically) up one of the footpaths to look at the area now known as Broc Hill Way because in the hollow behind Broc Hill Way were a cluster of old cottages, one of which had its kitchen hewn out of the solid rock. I always thought that this was Brocton Hollow but as I notice one or two addresses are given as Milford, - Dorothy and Leslie Pugh are shown in the telephone directory as The Chase, Milford and O. Wright as The Garth, Broc Hill Way, Milford - I can only presume I am wrong about Brocton Hollow, or perhaps there has been a change in the boundary line.

I only know one person who might help and that is Dorothy Pugh (nee Groucott) who has lived there all her life. Perhaps we shall have the opportunity of asking her one day. If we do it would be as well to check the spelling of Groucott - should it be Grocott?

Oh well, we can't go into that tonight so I will change direction completely and go down Park Lane and then Sawpit Lane.

Cheers,

Marjorie

P.S. Thank you very much for lending me your copy of the Church Magazine. I read with great interest the tribute to Stanley Groucott who was killed on a 1000 Bomber raid on Berlin. I did not know the exact date of his death because, as you know, in 1944 I was a lathe operator making components for tanks. When you are working 12 hour shifts and a 72 hour week you don't see many people to exchange news. It seems quite a coincidence that he should be killed on 29 January 1944 and fifty years later at the end of January 1994 I should be recalling the Saturday evening dances we used to enjoy down at the Village Institute. Stanley's regular partner was Margaret Holford from Bednall and I believe they would have married had Stanley not been killed on the raid. It was nice that Barbara and Leslie were able to make the pilgrimage to the 1939-1945 War Cemetery in Berlin and place a wreath of poppies by his grave as a tribute to Stanley's memory. I admire the way the family keep a vase of fresh flowers near the plaque in Brocton Church. The epitaph on the headstone of Stanley's grave is so very poignant, isn't it? "God takes our loved ones from our home, but never from our heart". In the same way the lines of poetry used at Armistice Day Services - "They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old" - are so true.

I can't picture Stanley as a seventy-one year old pensioner, nor even as a Flight Sergeant in the RAF; he will always live in my memory as a teenager, two years my junior, dancing to such tunes as Chicago, Deep Purple, Lullabye of Broadway or Marjie.

Unemployment was high in those pre-war years and money was tight. Redundancy pay was virtually unheard of and the poor practically starved to death, but for many of us they were happy times. We did not expect as much in the way of material things as today's teenagers. We made our own fun and an evening's dancing to records in a chilly village hall was as enjoyable as any modern disco with its strobe lighting - and it only cost sixpence, pre-decimal coinage.

THE THREE-DECKER

BERKSWICH PARISH MAGAZINE

March, 1994

FLIGHT SERGEANT, S. J. GROUCOTT 1923-1944

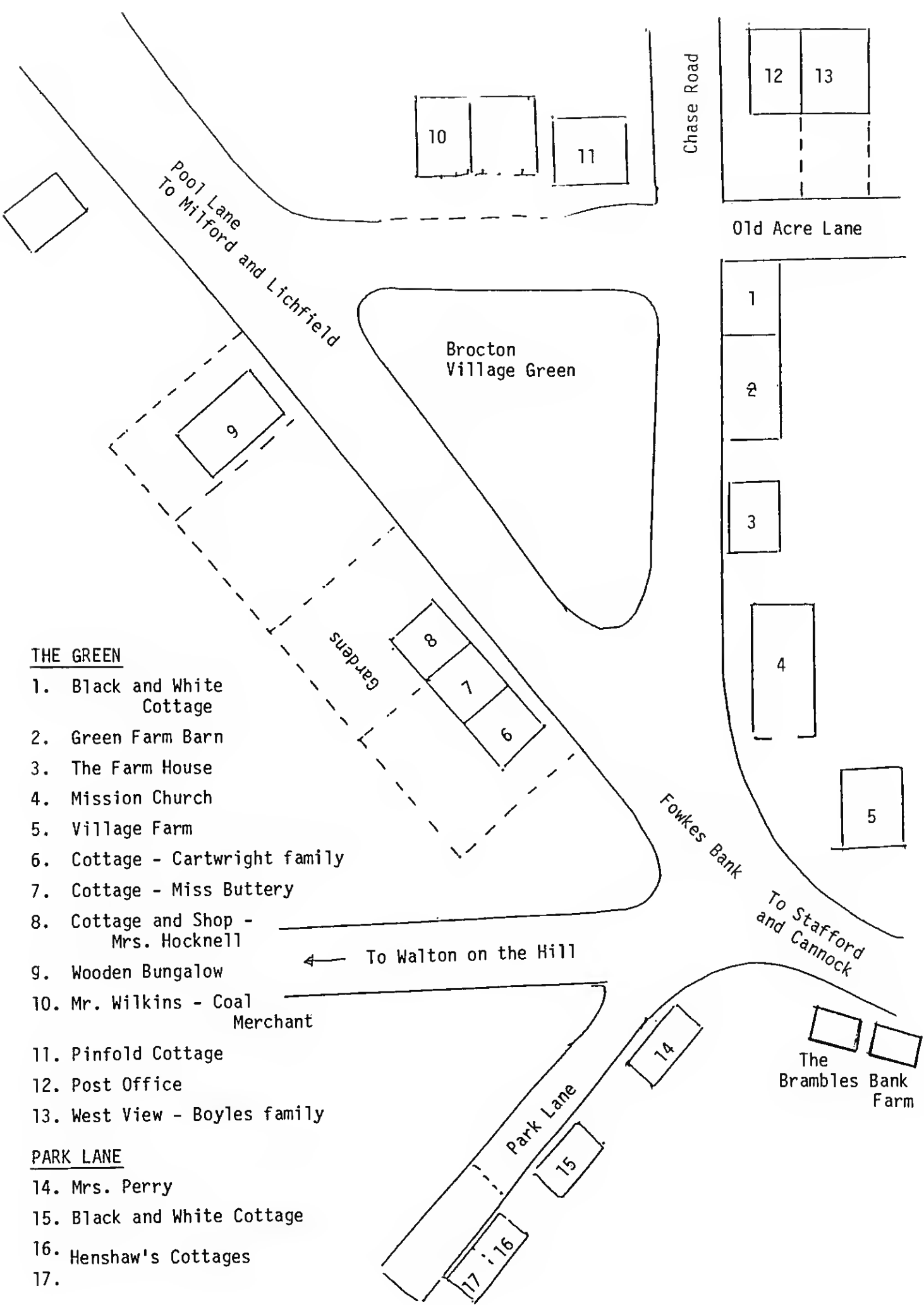
On the 29th of January, 1944, Brocton and our family suffered a grievous loss of a son, when my brother Stanley was killed during a 1000 bomber raid on Berlin. A small plaque in our little church of All Saints in Brocton, by which we always place a vase of flowers, keeps his memory and sacrifice alive.

This January, on the 50th anniversary of his death, I went, together with my brother Leslie, on a pilgrimage to the 1939-1945 War Cemetery in Berlin, to pay homage to Stanley, our much loved brother, and to place a wreath of poppies by his grave.

We were moved by the epitaph on his headstone—which is so true; it reads—

*"God takes our loved ones from our home,
but never from our hearts".*

Barbara Perry.



THE GREEN

1. Black and White Cottage
2. Green Farm Barn
3. The Farm House
4. Mission Church
5. Village Farm
6. Cottage - Cartwright family
7. Cottage - Miss Buttery
8. Cottage and Shop - Mrs. Hocknell
9. Wooden Bungalow
10. Mr. Wilkins - Coal Merchant
11. Pinfold Cottage
12. Post Office
13. West View - Boyles family

PARK LANE

14. Mrs. Perry
15. Black and White Cottage
16. Henshaw's Cottages
- 17.

PARK LANE AND SAWPIT LANE

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

Leaving the village in the direction signposted "To Cannock" you immediately pass the church and the telephone box. Yes, there was a 'phone box there even in those days. It was probably used more then than it is now as only a few people had the 'phone installed at home. The telephone exchange was at Milford alongside the White family's newsagent's shop, (what is now the White House Stores). The cost of a local call from the 'phone box was two pence (pre-decimal of course) for three minutes. If the exchange was not busy and the operator was in a generous mood you sometimes got a minute or so extra for your money.

After the War when we were eventually able to have the 'phone installed our number was Milford 291, a number which during the War was attached to Shugborough Military Hospital. I had a few calls from former patients or personnel trying to contact people they had known during the War. One evening the operator rang and said that an American, I can't recall his name, was on the 'phone from Liverpool and wanted to reverse the charges. There then followed a three point conversation between the American and me with the operator as go-between. Obviously, unless I was willing to pay for the call the operator was unwilling to connect the call. I did not know of any American likely to be calling me from Liverpool or anywhere else for that matter. It was only when I asked the operator to find out who he wished to contact that we discovered that he had been at Shugborough during the War and quite expected the Hospital would still be up and running. If my memory serves me well the Hospital was under canvas except for a few more permanent buildings for kitchens, ablutions etc. After the end of the War the site was used as a school camp for a time, but if the telephone was connected the number had been changed.

The 'phone number of the Picture House in Stafford was Stafford 291 against my Milford 291 and I occasionally got a call for two tickets for the back row of the stalls from a local resident who just asked for 291 without stating the exchange. In fact, one gentleman telephoned three times one evening to say his wife had left her umbrella behind after the Wednesday afternoon matinee and would I keep it safe until it could be collected! He was getting quite irate until we realised what was happening.

Can you explain to me why, when I start out from Brocton heading in the direction of Cannock, do I get sidetracked to Bridge Street in Stafford via Shugborough?

However, back to the 'phone box and instead of following the road as it curls to the left we will make another diversion (intentionally this time) and cross over to Park Lane. There are no houses on the right hand side of the Lane as the land on that side belongs to Brocton Hall, formerly the home of the Chetwynd family. In other words, the Lane abuts onto the Park-land, hence the name Park Lane.

In those days there were only four houses in all. The first one was newly built and the property of Mrs. Perry, the mother of Laura Richardson of Bank Farm. Mrs. Perry had recently retired from running the shop next to the Barley Mow Public House at Milford. She was a widow and two sons, Tom and Jack still lived at home. Both sons were "into" farming but their fields were not conveniently placed in relation to the house. Tom married and he and his wife, Lucy moved to a farm at Haughton. Jack stayed on in the village after he married and a house was built for him and Madge. It is rather squashed in between his mother's house and the farm buildings and I remember Mrs. Perry saying she regretted having it built there as it spoiled both houses. I was quite surprised a few years ago to hear it referred to as the "Old Farm House" because that conjured up in my mind a solid stone built place, not a pre-war villa. Jack stayed on in Brocton for some years. He used to deliver milk round part of the village and I have a clear memory of him pedalling along on an old sit up and beg bicycle, ladies' model, with his feet in clumpy farm boots turned outwards at about "ten to two". Two large capacity milk cans slung from the handlebars did nothing to steady his somewhat precarious balance. A number of the farms either sold milk at the door or delivered it to the customer in the morning and some even delivered in the evening as well. Profits must have been small but milk and egg money was a source of ready cash.

The next house was the black and white, half timbered place. When I can first remember it it was used by Mr. Bannister, a dentist whose surgery was in St. Mary's Grove, Stafford, as a second home. I have heard Ethel speak of three families who subsequently occupied the Cottage as the house was named. They were the Apse family, Blacks and Goodes, but I did not know them personally.

Just below the black and white house there was a farm gate across the lane with a wicket gate on the left for the convenience of pedestrians. Beyond the gate stood a pair of cottages. I always thought there was something a bit odd about their proportion but it was only recently when talking to Ethel that I discovered that originally it had been one farmhouse, not two. It was converted into two separate houses by adding a new porch and front door to the first part and building a stairway. I have only been in the living room of the second cottage so I do not know the layout, but Ethel and Len Cooper lived in the first one from the early months of the War when they thought the wooden bungalow did not offer much protection, until they moved up Old Acre Lane in 1947. It was not the most convenient of houses, being three stories high with a single room on each floor plus a single storey kitchen. You will remember, this was the kitchen where the bath was raised on blocks so that when it was not in use the lid could be closed down and it provided extra working space. The first floor bedroom was the same size as the living room and I can remember it housing a double bed and two cots plus other furniture without seeming unduly crowded. There was no access to the top floor except through the main bedroom as there was no landing. At the foot of the attic stairs and over the front porch area was a dead end bit of passageway. One occupant had made a bed frame so that it fitted into the passage space and provided a useful sleeping area for a child.

Back along Park Lane and turning right there is a house almost hidden behind a high hedge. This is "The Brambles" which when I first knew it was the home of the Fowke family. We always referred to the road at this point as Fowke's Bank but I think it is now regarded as part of Sawpit Lane.

Mr. C.E. Fowke was the leading photographer in the town. His studio was at the junction of Mill Bank and Victoria Road and there was always a tasteful display of studio portraits in the window. In the days before colour film and good quality easy-to-use cameras many families commissioned a studio portrait to celebrate special events and mile-stones, christening parties, wedding receptions, anniversaries, degree ceremonies, birthdays, and even pets were all recorded by Mr. Fowke's camera. There were, of course, other good photographers in Stafford but there was a certain panache to being the subject of one of these high class portraits. Me, I had to be content with a Kodak Brownie No. 2 box camera!

Continuing round the corner past The Brambles the next house was Bank Farm. The farmhouse, garden and orchard are set well back on the right and the farm buildings are on the opposite side of the road on the left. A pleasant arrangement in that none of the living accommodation overlooked the manure heaps or pig stys, but not nearly so convenient being distanced from the house if there was a sick animal to tend or a cow calving during the night. I have a vivid memory of Harold Richardson, on the odd occasions when he overslept, galloping down the drive, festooned with shiny milk buckets, and shouting for George the farm-hand to get a move on as they were late with the milking. The cows had to be milked, the milk cooled and strained into the big churns and out, with the previous evening's yield, on the roadside stand. If there were no churns out, unless the driver was in a very benevolent mood, he didn't stop and that was a financial blow a small firm could not stand, but the milk lorry waited for no man. No churns on the stand, no stop and hard luck.

Mrs. Richardson's ducks also found the arrangement a bit of a nuisance, their home - what do you call a duck's home? - was at the rear of the farmhouse but the duckpond was across the road. Having spent the afternoon dredging out the bottom of the pond they would decide to return to the house to see what was on the menu for supper. On warm evenings, especially at the weekend when cars were nose to tail along the road between Milford and Brocton Cross Roads you could hear the cars screeching to a halt in both directions. A loud clamour of quacking started up as the ducks queued in line to pass through the kissing gate and waddle calmly and unhurriedly across the road between the stationary vehicles. There were usually about twentyfive of them and of course ducks being ducks they had to proceed in single file, no doubling up to cross more quickly, no silly skittering about as you get from hens, silly creatures, but just one behind the other in strict noisy formation.

The pond is kept fresh by water diverted from the Old Acre Brook. It is piped in at one end and at the other it flowed back into the brook which at this point runs under the road on its way to service the lake at Brocton Hall. I have never followed the brook to see exactly where it goes as it would have meant trespassing, but from the Hall it must eventually pass under the Brocton to Walton Lane to Milford Hall and then under the Stafford to Milford Road to serve another duck pond and then under the railway embankment toward the river.

Just inside the Golf House gates is what would have originally been the Gatekeeper's Lodge at the Hall. It is a low oblong cottage, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Beddows. One or both of them worked at the Golf Club but I am not sure in what capacity.

The housing development along Sawpit Lane was just underway when we moved to Brocton. As you approach the cross roads several small bungalows were being built on the right hand side. They were not designed to accommodate a car as they did not have driveways, let alone garages or even garage space.

It was a different age. Some of the houses on the opposite side of Sawpit Lane were completed and sold before the war-time clampdown on house building. The prices seem laughable today but so were wages. The so-called three bedroom semis, which meant two reasonable sized bedrooms and a small one, were priced at £425.00 to £450.00 if they had separate dining room and sitting room, and those with only one reception room were £375.00. Today you would add two noughts to the figure and still be under priced. Wages are difficult to quote because so much depends on the trade and the job within the trade as well as the experience of the worker, but a shop assistant was probably paid about £3.00 for a 48 hour week.

Among shop assistants the highest paid were those in the food trade, next came the ironmongers and the rest followed on. Not that there was much to choose between them all.

The last property on Sawpit Lane was the bungalow occupied by Mrs. Gibbons and her son Stanley. Although I knew them both well by sight I knew nothing of their circumstances.

Our next trip will be along the A34 in first one direction and then the other, but as the houses are well spaced out it should not take too long.

Till next time,


Love,

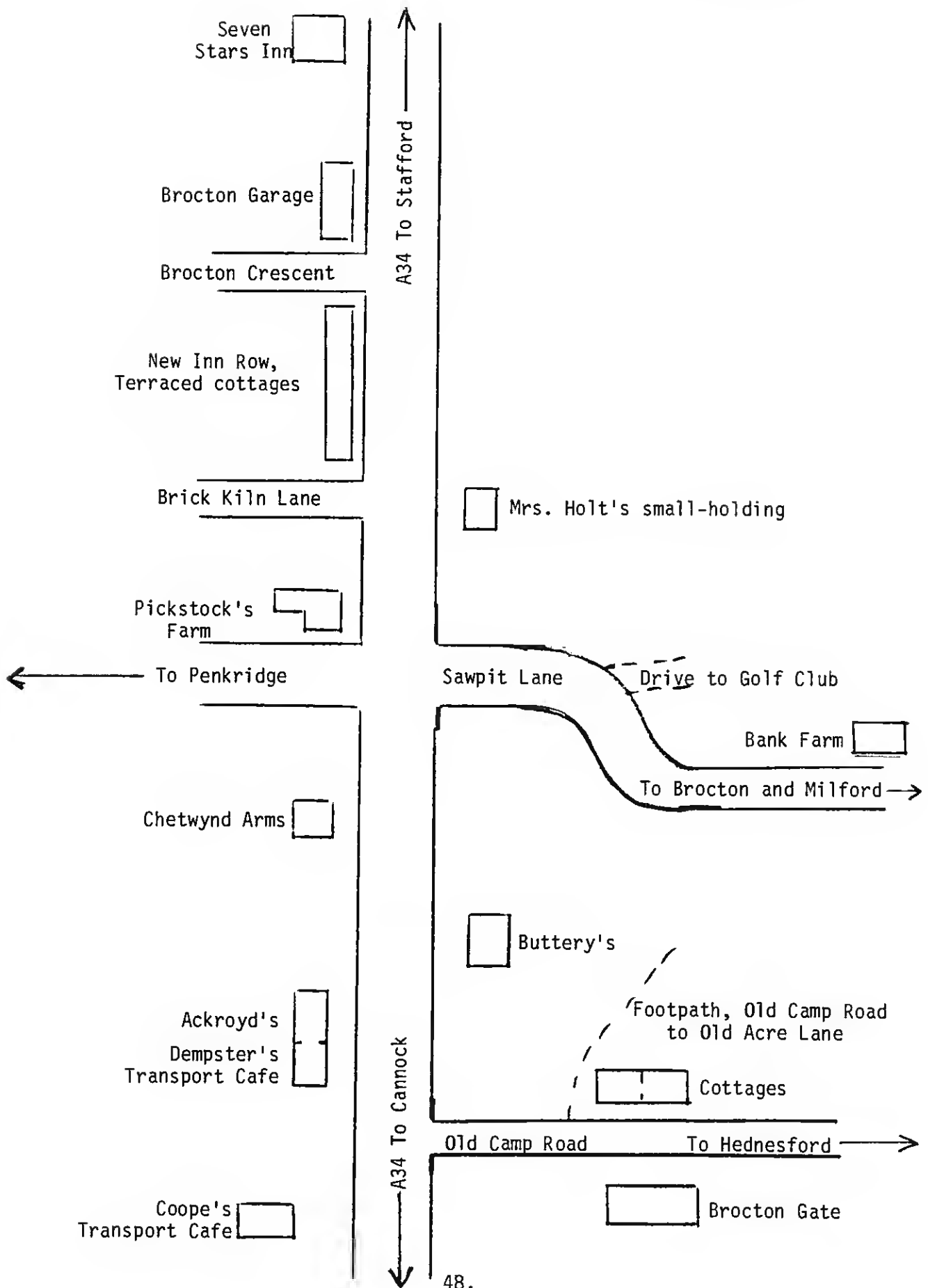
Marjorie



Bygone Brocton

BROCTON IN THE 1930's
A34, SEVEN STARS TO BROCTON GATE

 Park Farm,
Hollands



A34 SEVEN STARS INN TO BROCTON GATE

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

The last lap of our tour round Brocton takes us along the A34 from the Seven Stars Inn to the north and Brocton Gate to the south. Starting at Brocton Cross Roads turn right out of Sawpit Lane towards Stafford. The first house on the right hand side of the road is the small-holding run by Mrs. Holt. Carry on up the "Stars Bank" and still on the right and just beyond the Seven Stars Inn is a larger farm. It stands well back from the road and it had an official name which I can't remember. We always referred to it as Holland's Farm after the family who ran the farm. This will be the last farm with a Brocton address.

The Seven Stars Inn was, and probably still is, one of the Brocton pubs, the other being the Chetwynd Arms. It seems strange that both the public houses officially regarded as in Brocton should be so far from the Village Green. You almost wonder where the drinkers at the Seven Stars came from. There were no houses close by and anyone coming from Brocton had to pass the temptation of the "Chet", and you had to be anxious for a beer or a game of dominoes to walk from Walton or Acton. The Trumpet at Radford or the Barley Mow at Milford would have been just as convenient for the residents of Walton, especially in winter when it was too dark to use the field paths.

Mr. Knight was the landlord and I imagine he made a living as much from the small farm as from the pub. The two daughters, Effie and Vera, were at St. Leonard's School when I was. Vera was in the same class and we travelled home on the same bus after school but in a morning it was more convenient for me to catch the bus from the Village Green and go via Milford.

Leaving the Seven Stars and retracing our way back toward the cross roads, Poulson's garage stood at the bottom of the hill. Large letters on the workshop roof declared for all to see "ROP thats the spirit". I can't just remember what R.O.P. stood for - something or other oil and petrol perhaps. Anyway the said spirit was in those days one shilling a gallon.

Before he took over the garage I am told on good authority that Mr. Poulson was landlord of the Barley Mow public house at Milford. Whenever the Barley Mow comes into conversation I ask for the correct way to pronounce the word "Mow". I feel it should rhyme with "go", but most locals say Mow as if it rhymed with "cow", yet they pronounce "mow" in the same way as "go" when speaking of mowing the lawns. Then there is the place name Mow Cop and that rhymes with cow. Is there some hidden meaning I do not understand?

Next to the garage is a small crescent shaped development of bungalows mainly. This is Brocton Crescent. I don't think any of the houses were started in 1931/32 when we first came to Brocton but they were occupied before the war started. I don't think I have been along the Crescent for forty years so I am sure I should not recognise it.

Between Poulson's and Brick Kiln Lane is a row of terraced cottages, seven in all I think, but in one or two cases two cottages have been knocked into one to make a more spacious home. This was known as New Inn Row, but which was the New Inn referred to? The row is about equidistant between the Seven Stars and the Chetwynd Arms. I could name a few of the families who lived there - Ferneyhoughs, Marshalls, Hills, Gells, Chesters, Davies, but I cannot pretend to know any of them well.

In the 1930's there was, I think, only one secluded cottage down Brick Kiln Lane. It was not a place you would seek out unless you had business there. We must investigate sometime unless you are already familiar with the modern development. I have been told there are some "posh" houses down there now.

Back to the cross roads, Pickstock's Farm stands on the corner of Penkrige Lane. Mr. Pickstock was the farmer and I have no doubt the farm has another name. Miss Pickstock ably abetted her brother in running the farm. It is unfair to comment on the living conditions because I have never been further than the kitchen door, but from the outside it appeared as if the kitchen might be warm and cosy but the rooms at the front of the house, as seen from the bus stop, seemed cold and unused. I don't suppose they had a lot of time to sit in the parlour entertaining friends. The living kitchen was already warm and comfortable. Lots of families in those days only lit the fire in the "front room" on Sundays and the room never seemed to get fully aired. I knew Miss Pickstock slightly, mainly as a fellow member of the Women's Institute but that would be after the war.

On the opposite side of Penkrige Lane, a little way up from the corner, stands the Chetwynd Arms. Arthur Mayer was the landlord and he and Mrs. Mayer had one son, David. The "Chet", as it is affectionately known, was and still is a popular meeting place in the evening. The difference between then and now is that in 1930 the pub was strictly male territory. Very few women would venture into a pub even with a male escort and to tell the truth, I don't think they received a lot of encouragement. Another thought which just occurred to me, why do we say landlord for the man who runs a pub? I know publican is also used but why not the old-fashioned Innkeeper? I suppose all public houses are not strictly speaking Inns, but a landlord is something else entirely.

During the last war when I worked nights in the Tank Shop at the English Electric Co. we were allowed one night a week when we did not have to clock on until 10.00 p.m. instead of at 8.00 p.m. Within limits we could choose our late night and it could vary from week to week, but we were expected to keep some of each type of machine running. Provided I caught the bus which came through from Cannock at 9.30 p.m. I could just make it to Foregate for 10.00 o'clock provided the bus was on time. It was quite a walk from the Picture House to the old Dorman factory on the corner of Browning Street. There were more kerb edges to fall over in the darkness than you would think possible. Whichever night I chose for my late night, waiting at the cross roads for the same bus was a man carrying a music case - the sort provided for children having music lessons. Having seen him emerge from the Chetwynd Arms I presumed he must be the regular pianist but I was disillusioned one night when the handle on the music case became detached and out rolled two pint bottles of beer. No harm done, the bus politely waited until he scrambled the bottles back into the case and climbed aboard with the booty tucked safely under his arm.

Beyond the Chetwynd Arms on the same side of the road was a pair of semi-detached houses. The first one was run as an all-night transport cafe by the Dempster family. Bob and his wife worked days and one set of parents, I don't know which, worked the night shift. The A34 was really busy in those pre-motorway days and with heavy goods vehicles coming and going all night they were hardly the neighbours you would choose.

In the other semi lived the Akroyd family, Gill (Gilbert) Akroyd and his wife were retired mental nurses from Preston. They came to Stafford when their son Ian, who worked for the English Electric Company, was transferred from Preston to Stafford. Gill's sister Mabel moved with them but after a few years she decided to go back to Lancashire. The daughter, named Mabel after her aunt but often called May to distinguish the two, was about two years older than I was and as our mothers were quite good friends we saw a fair lot of one another.

Mr. and Mrs. Akroyd bred white angora rabbits which were regularly clipped and the fur or hair sold to a firm of spinners for making angora knitting yarn. Angora jumpers were fashionable, very lightweight and ultra tickly to wear, but the most popular use for angora yarn was for baby wear, bonnets and matinee coats and edgings to dress hems and necklines. Then someone decided that the fluffy hair was not good for babies and its popularity declined.

Mr. Akroyd was a gentle, well-read man who wore oval steel rimmed glasses. His ruddy complexion and wild, white hair were quite deceptive. He used to tour the district on his bicycle collecting dandelion leaves and other greenstuff for the rabbits. The profit from this hobby must have been small but it helped eke out their far from generous pension. When the spinning firm hit hard times as the popularity of Angora knitteds declined, they could no longer buy the clipped hair for cash but were prepared to exchange spun yarn for the staple hair. As a result of this arrangement I became the owner of a matching cap and scarf. Akroyds left Brocton and after living in Stafford for a time they went to Carnforth in Lancashire to look after an elderly lady. Ian married and he and his wife emigrated to New Zealand. Eventually the whole family, including Mabel's husband and daughter, went out to join them. We received a very welcome food parcel from Mrs. Akroyd one Christmas during the war. I am sure she could ill afford the cost but she was a generous person. There was some dried fruit and sugar I remember, and hidden in the middle of the tin of sugar was some New Zealand butter. This was not really allowed but customs turned a blind eye. Mrs. Akroyd and mother corresponded for years and she wrote graphically about how terrified she was when she experienced her first earth tremor. Some perfect strangers invited her in and provided tea and light refreshments until it was safe for her to resume her walk home with the shopping.

On the opposite side of the road lived the Buttery family. Mr. and Mrs. Buttery had eleven children, five sons and six daughters. As Edna, the youngest daughter once pointed out to me, you did not have to be superstitious in their family as if they were all at home they numbered thirteen to sit down for a meal. My mother was always very impressed that the whole family presented such a well turned out, healthy, happy appearance. My mother felt she had enough to cope with keeping one daughter fed and clothed let alone six daughters and in addition, five boys. Several of them, five I think, still live in the village.

A little way further along the A34 the Hednesford Road, known locally as the Old Camp Road, bears off to the left. Before turning off, a glance further along the main road and on the right hand side can be seen the site of another Transport Cafe. I can't answer as to how the quality of the food compared but there was certainly more room for large lorries and trailers to park here. In the days before the motorways opened there was enough trade to keep both cafes in business in spite of them being so close together.

The Cope family ran the second cafe. I only knew Marjorie who was at the High School when I was. Unfortunately she contracted tuberculosis. Her parents had a special annexe built onto the house for her, but unhappily she died before it could be put to use. The treatment for T.B. in those days was bed rest and an excess of cold, fresh air.

A short distance up the Old Camp Road on the right hand side stands Brocton Gate which was originally the farm house to the land sold to be excavated for gravel. Four unmarried women, the Joyce sisters, moved to the farmhouse at Brocton Gate when the farm was split up and the land sold off. Prior to that they had lived in Rowley Park, the high class residential area of Stafford. Although they were rich by our standards one of the sisters, in a rare moment of confidence, once remarked that their father would not allow them to train for a career or take up paid employment as they would be well provided for, and others less fortunate needed to earn their living. Their father had not foreseen that the cost of living would soar beyond all expectations. He lived in the era when you could employ resident domestic staff for a few pounds a year. Subsequently the sisters moved to the Weeping Cross area. Two of them lived in a house at the corner of Stockton Lane and the main road. The other two lived nearby. Finally they moved to retirement homes where Miss Gertrude, who incidentally was a great gardener and grew some of the tastiest tomatoes in the district, lived to enjoy her one hundredth birthday.

On the opposite side of the Old Camp Road is a pair of cottages, originally tied cottages for the farm workers I imagine. Jim Baker who operated the excavator at the Gravel Company lived in one of them but I can't remember who lived in the other one at that time. The make of the excavator was Ruston Bucyrus, a name that rolls richly off the tongue, I always thought.

Well, that completes our tour round Brocton and there is a convenient public footpath that leads along the boundary of the Gravel Company land to the end of Old Acre Lane. Very well planned, do I hear you say?

Although I have introduced a lot of families into my scribbling I have not said much about what went on in the village at that time. I will see what I can dredge up and ask a few people if they can remember anything I may have forgotten. I will let you know how successful I am.

Love,

Marjorie

GOINGS ON AT THE INSTITUTE - WHIST DRIVES

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

Now we have completed our introductory tour round the village I thought it would be a good idea to see what sort of entertainment the village had to offer its inhabitants. Apart from the little church, the village hall or institute was the only rendezvous for communal gatherings. There was no parish room as there often is in the village, and no school. I believe someone did bequeath money with the idea that a school should be built but it was decided that there were not enough children in Brocton to make it viable. The fund was used to pay the bus fare to Walton School, each way in Winter, but as the fund was not vast the scholars had to walk back to Brocton in summer. Quite a long trek for the little ones.

The goings-on at the Institute were almost entirely restricted to the evening. The day was for work, not pleasure, and there were no pre-school play groups to take up a morning booking.

One regular evening activity was the weekly Whist Drive held on a Monday evening. I believe the whist players still meet on Monday, but in the afternoon. Numbers are not so large as they used to be either. In the old days on a good night there would be as many as ten tables and three prizes a side. First, second and third highest scores from the ladies and the same from the gentlemen. Often there would be a booby prize for the lowest score. In addition to the regular weekly Whist Drive there would be the occasional "Big one". These were usually fund-raising evenings and were advertised in neighbouring villages. These events were well attended but it was the Christmas Drives that were the real crowd pullers.

In case all this enthusiasm about a card game seems out of proportion, remember that in the 1930's families tended to be larger and they had to make their own entertainment. With no television and often no radio or wireless set to listen to, card and board games were popular. Children's favourites were ludo, snakes and ladders or similar dice games, progressing to other board games such as draughts or even chess. Dominoes were played at home and in the public houses. I liked dominoes. There were several variations which could be played but fives and threes were the best. It helped simple addition and multiplication if only by three or five. Tiddly winks on the other hand I disliked intensely, probably because I was not very good at it. Card games of all kinds were popular. Snap and Beggar Your Neighbour could and were played with ordinary cards. Then there was Rummy and a variation played with two packs of cards called Coon Can. This was popular with our family and provided at least three people would play it was an entertaining game. More advanced card games were Whist, Solo Whist, where you had to declare in advance how many tricks you are going to be able to take, and Cribbage was a good game which could be played with two players. Bridge had not yet achieved the peak of popularity. Demanding greater skill and concentration Bridge did not lend itself to the sort of family game everyone joined in regardless of age, experience or ability. Not the most ardent fanatic I was quite often called upon to make the number up if a foursome was required for a particular game, so I gained a smattering of knowledge of most games.

When my parents went down to the weekly Whist Drive I usually stayed at home, sometimes to finish homework, sometimes for a quiet read. I used to lock the door as soon as Mum and Dad left but even so it was quite eerie. Most of the neighbours were also whist players. Mr. and Mrs. Buttery played, so did Mr. and Mrs. Briggs and the Rustells and Austins. Miss Smallwood and Mr. and Mrs. Tams and the Barnets. Who was left at home? - Mr. and Mrs. Jenkinson who on grounds of age did not go out in the evening, and me. There was a feeling of isolation when the mass exodus had taken place.

I remember one night in particular when Dad decided at the last minute to stay at home and nurse a cold he was suffering from. He sat by the fire reading and I was at the table writing when at about 9 o'clock there was a loud thump from the bedroom above. Dad jumped to his feet and shot upstairs. I followed him into the hall, but at a slower pace I must admit. Dad was soon back carrying a large framed photo of his mother and father. The picture cord had evidently not been renewed for years and it had chosen that particular time to finally give way and deposit Grandma and Grandad unceremoniously on the bedroom floor, fortunately without breaking the glass. I was very glad that Dad's cold had kept him at home that evening.

Although the weekly Whist drives were popular and well attended it was the Christmas Whist Drives that were the draw. These were planned sometime before the Festival and the various villages contended for the most popular evenings. It did not do to clash with a neighbouring village as each depended on support from its neighbours, otherwise both lost out. Brocton players went to Walton and Walton returned the compliment. If a small village hadn't the facilities to accommodate a large gathering then a group would get together to arrange transport. Nickoll's bus would sometimes be chartered to do the rounds picking up passengers from outlying places and returning them later.

Prizes were well worth winning. These were often donated by the gentry, farmers, butchers and various other trades people. Christmas poultry, sometimes still in feathers or more popularly dressed ready for the oven - why "dressed"? Surely "undressed" would be more accurate - joints of meat, pork, ham or beef were promised and a voucher issued for the prize to be collected a day or so before the day, bottles of port or sherry and bottles or half bottles of rum, whisky or gin, boxes of chocolates, crackers, nuts and sweets were included as were Christmas cakes and puddings. In fact, anything festive or Christmassy was well received.

When a "big" Whist Drive was being held at Brocton I often used to turn out with the whist players, not to play which I am sure you know. I knew the rudiments of the game and the basic rules but I was not a skilled player and I lacked the concentration and experience necessary to compete at a Whist Drive where it was a mortal sin to revoke, that is play a card of another suit when holding one of the suit that had been led. It was a "pistols at dawn" affair to trump your partner's ace or court card even though it might be the only option open to you.

These "big" Whist Drives started at the usual time and the same number of hands were played but with the crowd of people who attended everything took longer. Refreshments were more substantial than the usual cup of tea and a biscuit, more people took longer to serve. At the end of play there were more score cards to check, simply because there were more prizes to be won. Often it would be well after 11 o'clock when Mum and Dad got back home and they were not very keen to leave me alone so long, especially if all the close neighbours were going to be out as well.

My role at these Whist Drives was to see that the gas boiler had the water just nicely on the boil for the refreshment interval. Turn the gas too high and the water boiled away, covering everything with condensation; alternatively be too cautious and the water was not at the boil when it was wanted for making the tea. It was a great responsibility, I can tell you, getting the gas flame on that old boiler just right. When the interval was over the used crockery was carried through into the small room and dumped on a table. The washing up could wait, there was another twelve hands of whist to be played. How revolting the aftermath of a refreshment interval looks, half eaten cakes or a sandwich someone could not finish, cups and saucers half full of cold tea and sometimes cigarette ends stubbed out among it all. It was my privilege to refill the water boiler. Incidentally, it was the same type of boiler the Gas Board sold for boiling the weekly wash. The gas was turned full on so there would be plenty of hot water. There was no encouragement to linger in the Institute kitchen. It was cold and damp and I always suspected there might be mice, but come to think about it they would have starved to death as it was only occasionally there was any food about. While the water was heating there was time to sort out the crockery and carry it into the kitchen and scrape the debris of food into the waste bin. Then with a large bowl of hot soapy water it was time to tackle the real washing up. There would be eighty or more cups and saucers and small plates, a number of larger plates along with various milk jugs, sugar basins and large teapots, not to mention cutlery. If I got up a good head of steam, I mean me not the boiler, and provided there were plenty of teacloths I could just about manage to be putting away the last of the crockery by the time the score cards were checked. Sometimes there would be a bit of entertainment while the checking was going on. Someone might improvise on the piano or start up Carol Singing and I can remember being embarrassed by my mother reciting Yorkshire dialect rhymes. It was quite exciting waiting for the prize winners to be announced and watching them go up to choose their prizes. It was always better to be allowed to choose than to have them awarded. A bottle of rum is no good if you are a non-drinker and a dressed turkey may not be appreciated by the local poultry farmer. If you were among the winners you kept your fingers crossed as your turn approached, especially if you had your eye on something. Mum and Dad were reasonably lucky, I remember one year when Mother won a turkey and Dad a bottle of whisky.

I say Mum and Dad were lucky and so they were, because no-one can play successfully if the cards are against them but there is also the skill and experience to consider. There is also a certain amount of strategy which can be put into play. Although you may arrive at a Whist Drive with a partner you may start off together but you are not allowed to play together all evening unless the Drive is specifically advertised as a Partner Drive, when different rules apply. When attending an ordinary Whist Drive you play what is known as progressive Whist, which means that you progress (unless very unlucky) round the tables. If you and your partner play together for the first hand and win, that is take more tricks than the other couple at the table, everything is lovely, you both move to the next table, but not the same table. The lady moves up, e.g. from table 2 to table 3, but the gentleman moves down from table 2 to table 1. Dependant upon your luck and skill and the number of tables in play you will probably not play again at the same table until toward the end of the evening. The crunch comes if at the first game you and your partner lose, because then one of you will lose the next hand as well. This is because the losing couple stay at the same table but the gentleman moves round one chair so that the original partners are now opponents. One will win and the other lose. This has been known to spark off family recriminations. Though not guilty of sniping at one another in public, my parents often opted to start at opposite ends of the room with someone outside the family as partner and accept the run of the cards.

I once read that competitions at the Women's Institute were light-hearted affairs though they had been known to generate more heat than light. The same applies to Whist Drives. Thank some deity for the person who invented Scrabble, but I have heard of that causing dissent.

That is quite enough for tonight, I think perhaps next week we will go dancing.

Cheers,

Marjorie.

P.S. Although it is more than 50 years since the heyday of the Institute Whist Drives I still have one or two reminders of Mum and Dad's ability at the game. The two small green glass fruit dishes I use regularly are all that now remain of a jelly set Dad won. Originally there were six of the small dishes and a serving bowl. There is also a pretty pink china sweet dish in the shape of a trefoil. The two tier china cake stand we dusted off recently was one of Mother's prizes and also the lemonade jug and glasses. Considering how thin the glass is I am surprised that as many as five of the glasses are still intact.



Mary Lawlor, Marjorie Jeavons, Mrs. Jeavons

GOINGS ON AT THE INSTITUTE - DANCES

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

Last week I promised you that there would be more goings-on at the Institute and here they are. The regular Whist Drive took up Monday evening and in the same way another popular evening activity at the village Institute was Ballroom Dancing on Saturday evenings. The admission price was sixpence and the dancing started at 7.30 and went on until 11.00 p.m. in the early days and later until 12.00 o'clock midnight. The music had to stop at midnight otherwise it desecrated the Sabbath.

We danced to records, the old 78's which broke if dropped. Mr. Briggs acted as Master of Ceremonies but as we were not an unruly lot he was able to combine his duties as M.C. with selecting and playing the records. I am not sure whether the music system belonged to Mr. Briggs or to the Institute but I rather think it was the former. It was often quite difficult to hear the music in spite of the amplification, the shuffle of shoe leather on the none-too-smooth old floorboards was enough to drown out the loudest music and if it happened to be a wet evening the drumming of the rain on the corrugated iron roof was deafening. The noise of the rain has been known to cause speakers to dry up and it once brought the Dramatic Society to a halt.

The dances were going strong in 1938. I know that on good authority because my informant met her husband-to-be at the dances. I could not be so sure of the date because I had nothing special to remember it by.

In those days girls were a bit hesitant at turning up at a dance without a partner unless they were with a group of friends or neighbours. A girl would soon have been labelled "fast" and that was a stigma. "It takes two to Tango" was a popular saying and the same applied to the Waltz, the Foxtrot and the Quickstep. Dancing couples in the 1930's covered quite a few miles round the dance floor but apart from making the ball of the foot ache and stretching the calf muscles it did not exercise the body. Not like the modern style when it is every man or woman for him/herself and all that is required is about two square feet of floor space and the ability to wiggle the hips. I am sure I sound as pedantic to the youth of today as my mother did to me when she condemned the Jive and the Twist. She associated them with pagan rites and they were out of place at a village dance. Fortunately I was not very adept at jiving so a clash of will power was avoided.

Special powder was sprinkled on the wooden floor to make it slippery and when coupled with the dust raised from the old floorboards, it tickled the nose and parched the throat. We were eager for a cup of tea at the interval. Usually refreshments consisted of a cup of tea and a biscuit but sometimes, I am reminded, one or two of the regulars were persuaded to make a few cakes. None of us seem to remember the exact price of the refreshments but it would only be coppers, twopence for a cup of tea and the same for a small cake, while a penny would buy one or two biscuits, dependant on the variety. Mrs. Lambert and Mrs. Davies were usually in charge of refreshments. I am sure our Saturday dances would seem very tame affairs compared to the modern disco with its blaring music and colourful flashing lights. Our music was tuneful and most of the dance tunes had good lyrics so you could sing along if you felt inclined.

I remember one night sometime after the sixpenny dances were started as a fund raising effort, Mrs. Lambert wanting to clarify a point asked, "Is it to be a posh or a pop do"? The phrase stuck for a long time. At a "posh do" the men wore tailored suits and the ladies a late day or party dress, long or short according to the prevailing fashion. There were, of course, degrees of "poshness". Very posh meant that the men wore evening dress, black jacket and bow tie, and the ladies wore long evening dresses and the music would be provided by the local dance band. We did not run to many very posh "do's". The ordinary posh dance was easier to organise and was just as profitable. A pop, short for popular, dance could be arranged at very short notice, dress was anything seasonal and in summer, or if the room became very hot, the men were allowed to remove their jackets and dance in shirt sleeves provided they did not display a pair of braces. I am not going to dwell on the cut of men's clothes because as a "spinster of this parish" as the lawyers say, I am not supposed to have noticed it, but on the other hand, as a fashion student, I am expected to know a bit about it. The point I wanted to make was that in those days men's trousers fitted to the waist or above and depended on braces for support.

Self-supporting waistbands were only to be found on summer slacks and flannels. Hipsters would have been considered indecent. Shirts were of starched cotton and the collar wilted as the evening progressed. The modern comfortable knitted shirts with their easy laundering qualities had not even reached the drawing board. I doubt if they were even a twinkle in the designer's eye.

Refreshments too reflected the sort of dance it was. At the lowest end of the scale there was the ubiquitous cup of tea and a biscuit or two, next would be a choice of tea or coffee or, in summer, a lemonade and home-made cakes. At the upper end you could expect sandwiches, sausage rolls, sometimes vol-au-vents, fancy cakes and sometimes even trifles.

The ladies of the committee or female members of the Society organising the dance were expected to provide a share of the refreshments. Sometimes the price was included in the cost of admission and at others you made a selection and paid up at the end of the line. This would be the procedure if outside caterers were employed.

Another thing which denoted the degree of poshness was the silver ball, a mirror studded orb which was suspended from the ceiling in the middle of the hall and as it twisted in the warm air a coloured spot light played on it and with the hall lights dimmed the facets of mirror flashed silver and coloured light round the hall - much more stately and subdued than the modern disco lights.

Then at the bigger dances there were spot prizes. As the dancers circulated, usually to waltz music as it was slower and more stately, some official or important visitor would choose a spot on the dance floor. At some point during the dance the music would stop and a small prize would be awarded to the couple nearest the selected spot. Sometimes a spot light was used and the beam played on the dancers. The couple under the spot light when the music stopped were the winners.

Before the American servicemen introduced us to the Jive and the Twist all dances had set steps which had to be learnt. You could not get away with wiggling your hips and moving your feet to the rhythm of the music. You needed lessons in Ballroom Dancing and this goes back to Regency times when the dances were the Quadrille and the Minuet. The main difference was that in those days you danced at arm's length from your partner. None of Joyce Grenfell's "Dancing it Bust to Bust".

The Viennese Waltz was considered too forward for genteel young ladies of the Regency period just as the Jive and Twist were not quite seemly from our parent's viewpoint.

We danced the Waltz both modern and old time. What a giddy experience the old time Waltz was. One, two, three, one, two, three revolving clockwise the whole time. When the head began to spin considerate partners would ask, "Do you reverse?" and, if you did, then the pair of you would dance a few bars revolving anti-clockwise to unwind.

The Quickstep, which was based on the Foxtrot, was fairly simple in its basic form and most people could manage it without trampling on their partner's toes. There were more complicated steps which could be learnt as you gained confidence and experience. The Tango and the Slow Foxtrot were more difficult but they were very popular with those who had mastered the steps. Then there were the more lively dances such as the Military Two Step and those Cockney orientated ones, the Lambeth Walk and the Palais Glide, to say nothing of Hands, Knees and Booms-a-Daisy. The Military Two Step could be quite stately or a bit of a romp according to the version you knew. The old Institute floor threatened to give way under our pounding feet when the more boisterous version was in progress. The Charleston and the Lancers had gone out of fashion but I can just remember them being danced by my older cousins. The Polka too had lost its popularity with its one, two, three hop rhythm; it was good for a warm up on a cold evening. It could be quite painful on the hop if one of you had your knee at the wrong angle. It was no longer a case of, "Can you dance the Polka?" - you dance it just like this!

When we were talking a few days ago you seemed unfamiliar with the "Paul Jones". Well, it was really a medley of dances selected according to the whim of the Master of Ceremonies or the band leader (or record player). The first dance might well be a Quickstep which would be danced in the usual way with a chosen partner. Then the music would change to a rhythmic sort of March, the couples parted and formed two rings, the gentlemen on the outside paraded anti-clockwise and the ladies formed the inner ring and moved clockwise. After a few bars the music would stop and the gentleman was honour bound to offer to partner the lady opposite him at the time. The next dance might well be a Waltz. The sequence of parade and dance would be repeated several times with a different dance and a different partner each time. It was quite good fun except when you landed a partner with two left feet for a dance you were particularly fond of.

The Valeta was a pleasant dance and there was a variation of the Waltz called the St. Bernard Waltz. I can't remember the steps but I can recall everyone enjoying it. The dances always finished with a Waltz Medley, the final dance of the evening, timed to finish a minute or two before midnight, was The Last Waltz.

When the dance ended it was no use expecting Mum or Dad to be outside with the car waiting to drive you home. I was one of the fortunate ones as I did not have far to walk. I think George and Sidney Barnett were the only people who had a shorter walk. The last bit of Old Acre Lane was lonely and at midnight almost everyone would be in bed and the only light was your own torch. I could never decide whether to walk in the dark so if anyone was lurking under the hedge they could not see exactly where you were, or to flash the torch about in the hope of being warned and making a getaway. Fortunately I never had to put it to the test.

A school friend, Eunice Wilson from Walton, frequently came to the dances and she would stay overnight with us. I don't suppose her parents would have agreed to her coming if she had been expected to walk or cycle home at midnight. The majority of the dancers headed toward Milford or along Sawpit Lane to Brocton Cross Roads and Bednall.

I was pleasantly surprised at the number of names I was able to remember after all these years and with the help of Ada Bott we were able to recall over thirty names. From Brocton there were George and Ernest Smallwood from Pool Lane, Stanley Groucott and Barbara from Brook Lane, Sidney and George Barnett from Old Acre Lane I have already mentioned, Denis (or should it be Dennis) Lambert whose mother helped organise the refreshments and I think his dad acted as doorman and collected our sixpences, Arthur Williams before he joined the Army lived up Chase Road, Jack Oakland and his brother Bob lived at the cross roads and from just above the Chetwynd Arms on the opposite side of the A34 we had Joan, Ada and Norman Buttery.

The Bednall crowd were very loyal and always turned out in force - Margaret Holford and Noreen Garner, Betty Coope and Edna Griffiths along with Edgar Bott came from Bednall Village as far as I can remember. Then there was the contingent from Bednall Head, Alf and Jack Bancroft, Evelyn and Lawrence Cooper and Evelyn's friend Ruth Mills.

The regulars from Milford included Joan Beeston and her brother Ray and Ida and Nellie Tilstone. Dorothy Groucott lived in the area about halfway between Brocton and Milford now known as Brock Hill Way.

There were two more girls whose names I cannot recall. One was Lena who became Mrs. George Smallwood and Margaret from the Queensville area who married George Barnett.

One long distance traveller was Ron Martin from Rawnsley which is in the Hednesford district. As he married Joan Buttery in 1940 one is forgiven for suspecting it was not the par excellence of the Institute's dance floor that brought him to Brocton. Joan and Ron as you know still live in the village at Avondale, the white bungalow on the Green.

Although this was not the case with Joan and Ron, as they were already acquainted, the Saturday night dance did prove to be successful as a matrimonial agency. I have already mentioned two couples and in addition Ada Buttery and Edgar Bott married and now live just a few houses down the lane.

Noreen Garner became Mrs. Denis Lambert and if Stanley Groucott had survived the bombing raid, who knows but what he and Margaret Holford would have added to the statistics.

However, all this was soon to change. When the black out regulations came into force, making it an offence to show a light from even a curtained window or an open door, a bicycle lamp or a torch, there was discussion as to whether the Institute would be used enough to warrant the expense of thickly lined curtains or window shutters. There was also the question of whether or not people would want to turn out in the evenings to stumble about in almost complete darkness to attend some function in the Village Institute. What very few people had realised at this stage was that soon there would be very few people available to socialise in the evenings.

It became law that anyone over eighteen years of age and under forty was liable for conscription unless they were in a "Reserved Occupation" or already doing "Work of National Importance". The difference between the two was so subtle it scarcely mattered. If you were already in a Reserved Occupation you tended to be doing work of National Importance. When called up most of the boys went into the Armed Forces, usually the Army or the Air Force. There was nothing against a young man volunteering for the Navy but in the Midlands the Army or R.A.F. had the greater appeal. Other alternatives were the Fire Service or the coal mines.

Boys who were conscripted to work in the mines and "Keep the home fires burning" were known as Bevin boys after the Member of Parliament who introduced the idea, Aneurin Bevan (Nye Bevan). Unattached girls were also drafted into the Forces or one of the Industries supplying munitions or making tanks or other machines of War. Some girls opted for nursing or the Land Army where they worked on farms so that a man could be released for active service. Usually you had little choice in the matter and you were directed where you were most needed, maybe because you had special skills or simply because there was a shortage of personnel in some area. I was told at my interview that "they" were recruiting for industry that week. However, as I had had a High School education I would be given favourable consideration should I wish to apply for one of the Women's Services. My mother was far from well and I was useful, especially as I worked in the town centre, in obtaining any unrationed odds and ends of food that were available. I also realised that if I absolutely hated engineering it would be easier to get a transfer to the Forces than from the Forces into making parts for tanks. So into Industry I went and taking it all round, it was not too bad.

The call up as I am sure you can see affected about 80% of those who attended the Saturday night dances so it was decided to discontinue them at least temporarily. Temporarily turned out to be a long time, as Ada Bott said only a few days ago. She and Edgar went to live with her sister and brother-in-law, Joan and Ron Martin for a few weeks and stayed twelve years.

However, that was the end of our Saturday night dances for longer than we expected.

Must stop now.

Love from Marjorie

GOINGS-ON AT THE INSTITUTE - THE W.I.

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

The Brocton Women's Institute held its monthly meeting in the evening of the second Wednesday of the month, just as they do today. In the 1930's not many women were employed outside the home but they were busy seeing to the needs of the family. With no convenience foods such as are available today home cooking and baking took up a large part of the housewife's time. It was the same with washing, no throwing everything into an automatic machine and getting on with some other task while the machine washed, rinsed and extracted the water. The clothes had to be rubbed and scrubbed and agitated in soapy water with a copper suction cup called a "posser". The soapy water was extracted from the clothes by putting them through a mangle or wringer, then they were rinsed thoroughly and mangled again to leave them as dry as possible. White cottons, such as table cloths, pillowcases and shirts, were usually given a blue rinse to enhance the whiteness before being starched to give a crisp finish. The washed clothes were dried out of doors if possible. A wet wash day was a misery for the whole family, wet clothes draped over the "horse" in front of the fire giving off steam so the atmosphere was nearly as damp indoors as it was outside in the rain. If there was a large family to wash for, the ironing would, in all probability, have to wait until the next day. Electric irons were just coming onto the market but they were not thermostatically controlled nor did they spout steam at the touch of a button. The only way to control the heat was by switching the electric power on and off. Even so, the electric iron of the 1930's was a great improvement on the old flat iron which had to be heated in front of the living room fire or cooking range. It was the advent of the Gravel Company that persuaded the Electricity Board to bring electricity up Old Acre Lane. In fact, although the house was wired for electricity, we had to wait several weeks before we were connected to the mains. I can remember Mother saying that the two things that changed her life were the electric iron and the electric vacuum cleaner. No more brushing carpets with a stiff brush and catching the bits in a dustpan. Our first cleaner was a cylinder type from Gamages in London and the price was two pounds ten shillings - a fortune in those days.

I am sorry I diverted to such length into house-keeping in the 1930's but I just wanted to explain why meetings were held in the evening rather than the afternoon. Women were still busy with household chores until late afternoon and then there would be a substantial tea to provide.

The Brocton W.I. did meet in the afternoon for a year or two during the War but this was due to the problems of getting about during the Blackout and to the difficulty of ensuring that no lights showed at the Institute. Petrol shortage and curtailed public transport made it difficult for the speaker to get to and from the meeting, especially late at night.

The W.I. Motto is, "For home and country" and it is strictly a rural organisation devoted to the needs and interests of country women. Meetings are held once a month and are strictly formulated and each Village Institute is expected to obey the rules. So many meetings a year had to have some educational content. An outing to the seaside in summer and a Christmas party in December were considered to be frivolous. A quick reading of the previous month's Minutes has been known to convert a party into a business or educational meeting. The format of the meeting is the same country wide. The singing of Jerusalem usually opened the meeting, but some Institutes preferred to leave it to the end.

Then comes the business meeting, starting with the reading of the Minutes of the last meeting by the Secretary. These are put to the meeting as a correct record and if no-one disagrees the President signs them accordingly. Matters arising must then be discussed and resolved as far as possible. After that Any Other Business on the Agenda and Correspondence can be given time for discussion. The Treasurer is then called upon to give a brief report on the financial state of the Institute. The President conducts the meeting or if she is unable to be present the Vice-President will take over. These are known as the Officers and are voted into office at the Annual Meeting. A number of Ordinary Committee Members are also voted for but the exact number depends upon the total membership.

When the business is completed the President introduces the Speaker or Demonstrator. A Programme of Speakers will have been drawn up prior to the Annual Meeting and usually each member will be provided with a printed card for reference. Cookery and handicraft demonstrations were always popular. Talks on travel and/or life in other countries, child and animal welfare are always well received. Various aspects of gardening and plant propagation interest a fair proportion of members. Any W.I. speaker quickly learns even if he/she is not already aware of it, that of the members present only a relatively small proportion will be really interested in the subject of the evening's talk or demonstration. They may have asked for the talk. Some members will be mildly interested, a few will have come along because they enjoy the W.I. whatever the subject, others attend from a sense of duty or because a sit down would be welcome, especially when the evening is rounded off by a slice of cake which someone else has baked and a cup of tea made and brought to you by the hostess of the evening. A very small minority have been known to have a nap during the Speaker's oration. If you happen to be the Speaker or Demonstrator it is no use feeling slighted as no slight is intended. I have at various times watched eyelids being forced open for a split second only to snap shut again immediately, or someone's chin drop onto their chest with a neck breaking jerk or even more embarrassing for the perpetrator, heard the sudden snort of a snore. I remember a friend who had driven me to the meeting being incensed on my behalf and saying disgustedly, "Three people dozed off during the demonstration". You can either take the attitude that the sleepers had had a tiring day or that you yourself had been more boring than usual.

It was always the duty of some poor soul to stand up at the end of the talk and give a vote of thanks to the Speaker. An unenviable task and one that I did not enjoy whether I was the giver or receiver of the thanks. If the subject of the talk was one which interested you particularly the tendency was to concentrate on the talk and forget the vote of thanks, or in silently rehearsing your little speech miss a salient point of the talk.

At last, refreshment time, and the opportunity to rise from a hard chair and stretch your legs and as the first mouthful of tea lubricates the throat have a chat with fellow members, many of whom you have not seen since the previous month's meeting. The food served at W.I. meetings varied from a solitary cup of tea to a banquet of freshly cut sandwiches and delicious home made cakes. Brocton had a good reputation for refreshments.

Things have changed now, I am sure, but in the days before the War "the social half hour" was insisted upon. This was often a chore for everyone concerned, the member whose turn it was to organise a game or quiz and for the members who would have preferred to linger over their refreshments and have a good gossip and catch up on the village news and views. After years of trying to insist that the social half hour be part of the meeting I think the message finally got through to head office. When I last attended W.I. meetings I rarely came across a formal social half hour, or even ten minutes.

Then of course there was the competition. I have mentioned in an earlier letter that W.I. competitions were said to be light hearted affairs which often created more heat than light. How true. The Speaker for the evening was, and I suspect still is, often asked to judge the competition. Usually this was because he or she is the only impartial person in the room. This is alright if you have some knowledge of the craft or subject concerned or you are told what the criteria are but to be asked to judge something at which you have neither skill nor knowledge is fraught with danger. Load your car before announcing the winner, pick up your handbag, say a hurried goodnight and make a quick get-away is a safe if cowardly way out. I really am joking. Most members will have entered to add to the interest, not because they are particularly skilled at, for example, creating an Easter bonnet from last week's free paper and four pins! I have judged some very inventive articles and it is usually possible to find something encouraging to say about most entries. The occasion I found most difficult was when I came across items made at one of my classes and under my instruction. Your impartiality is immediately in question.

I hate to hear the Women's Institute condemned as "All jam and Jerusalem!" Yes, they did make jam to help out wartime shortages and it was appreciated. I can remember groups of W.I. members, my mother included, gathering blackberries and with an allowance of sugar, making them into jam in the old Institute kitchen. Another asset on loan to members was the W.I. canning machine. This had to be used at the Institute and two members had to be present. I can remember canning peaches to preserve for Christmas, six cans of peaches were more than welcome at party time, especially coupon-free.

The W.I. both at County and National level have done a great deal to set and maintain high levels of craft standards, to improve design and train demonstrators, teachers and judges. They have produced well written, colourfully illustrated leaflets and books on a wide variety of subjects and even purchased and equipped their own residential college. Each county was called upon to make a contribution and naturally Staffordshire was asked to supply the crockery. A week or weekend on a course at Denman College was quite an experience. In the early days we all had certain tasks to perform, clearing tables after meals, serving morning coffee and washing up afterwards. You were expected to watch the rota board so you knew what your duties were. Now I am told that apart from making your own bed and keeping your room tidy no household duties are expected of you.

In addition to the courses held at Denman College the W.I. movement was and still is responsible for arranging courses and classes within the County, sometimes for individual villages, sometimes for groups of Institutes. If a talk or demonstration arouses sufficient interest among members, a course of classes might be arranged. A few members from each of several Institutes might band together to study the subject in greater detail. Sometimes classes were arranged privately, but more often the Local Education Authority supplied the teacher. It was cheaper this way as the L.E.A. subsidised the teacher's pay and often they would also help with the cost of a room in which to hold the class, or allow the village school to be used. These classes did a lot to raise standards of craftwork nationwide. Instruction was not restricted to handicrafts but encompassed sport, keep fit, drama groups and choirs. Wherever there was enough local interest the W.I. could be relied upon to encourage talent.

Well, I think I have devoted enough time to extolling the virtues of the Women's Institute. They only occupied the Brocton Institute one evening a month on a regular basis and there are quite a few other groups and clubs who used it more frequently. I am going to stop now.

Sincerely,

Marjorie

GOINGS-ON AT THE INSTITUTE -
THE COUNTY LIBRARY LOAN SERVICE

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

Although it did not attract as many people as a dance or a whist drive, another service for which the Institute was used was the County Library. Compared to the modern, well appointed, purpose built Mobile Library vans which tour the rural areas of the County on a weekly or fortnightly basis the old system seems quite crude and inadequate. It was however a well used and valued service. The County Library, whose headquarters were off Friar's Terrace, delivered boxes of books to the country villages. Arrangements were made for these to be stored in the village school or hall. In the case of Brocton it was in the smaller function room at the Institute. The post of Librarian was an honorary one only requiring someone with a love for books and a little spare time. The library was only open one evening a week for about an hour. The boxes the books travelled in were quite large, memory suggests 36" x 20", but I could be way out, and the depth was sufficient for the average book to stand spine uppermost for easy reference. There would be three or four boxes available, the exact number depended on the size of the village and the popularity of the service. The selection included fiction and non-fiction, and there would be reference and instruction books for a variety of crafts and hobbies, embroidery, dressmaking, basketry, cookery, woodwork or gardening. Also included would be a small collection of children's books.

Every few weeks the librarian would sort out the books which had been well-used along with any that had not proved popular and pack them into one or two of the storage boxes and label them for collection by the County Library van. Then there would be a visit to Library Headquarters to select fresh books to replace those being exchanged. These would in due course be delivered to the Village Hall and the boxes of discarded books collected and taken back to the main library. A more cumbersome arrangement than the modern mobile library but the service worked well and was much appreciated by the readers.

Dad and I were regular customers and great was the lament if we forgot it was library night or for some reason we were not able to change our books. The library did not take up much time at the Institute but it was a popular and well used service.

In those days the County and Borough Libraries were completely separate, the County Library being designed to cater for residents in the rural district and the Borough one for those who lived within the Borough boundary. There were concessions. If you attended the High School or Grammar School you could belong to the Borough library although you lived outside the town and similarly, if you worked in the town centre you gained membership for the same ridiculously small subscription as the town dwellers. When I passed the scholarship exam, along with the other successful candidates, I was marched in crocodile to the Borough library from St. Leonard's School and given a talk on the Library Service and a conducted tour of the library and Art Gallery.

The subscription to belong to the Borough Library was in those days two-pence for children still at school and sixpence for adults for a year's membership. Mother still thought twice about allowing me to join, not because she was mean about the coppers, but because she did not really approve of anyone having their nose in a book. They would, in her opinion, have been better employed in the garden, fetching lumps of concrete to build the drystone walls, or perhaps dusting the bedrooms or washing up. Fortunately Dad did not share her opinion. I never remember him reading to improve his education but he read for pleasure. It is a good job he did otherwise he would not have known what to do with his time when he retired from work because he did not have any hobbies such as photography, home decorating, woodwork or music.

Well, I seem to have deviated from what went on at the Institute but in fact there is not a lot more to say. Other activities did take place. I remember the play Miss Ooris Buttery organised with all the school children, I think I mentioned this earlier in relation to one of the boys making himself sick by smoking his first cigarette. I was the Queen of Hearts and I wandered about the stage wringing my hands and crying, "Oh my tarts, my tarts". I had a white crepe paper dress and a gold tiara.

Other activities were short-term or intermittent, perhaps for two hours on one evening a week for six weeks to learn leather work, or perhaps quilting.

The Gas and Electricity Boards were very good at bringing out all the equipment necessary and putting on a cookery demonstration. The Institute Committee would from time to time organise a fund-raising effort such as a dance, social, whist drive or a rummage sale. These goings-on were good for the community because they brought people together in an informal way. It is surprising what friendships can be struck whilst presiding over a stall of cast-off clothing or drying fifty or sixty cups and saucers.

All for now, we will return to the Institute later.

Love,

from Marjorie

CHASE FIRES

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

Although we have lived right on the edge of the Chase since 1934 I have only experienced two really serious fires which were close enough to prove a serious threat to house and home. The first of them occurred in June 1939, and I remember it quite well but I was delighted to find a newspaper report of the incident in Mrs. Phyllis Brew's book of News Cuttings which Rupert, her son, has been generous enough to lend to me. The cutting has been trimmed close to the text so it does not show which news reporter covered the fire or the name of the newspaper from which the cutting was taken. The date, June 1939, is hand written alongside the heading which states in large print, "Houses threatened by Chase Fire", and I am almost certain it was Whitsuntide but I cannot remember the exact date. I can vouch for the accuracy of a lot of the report so I am going to give it to you almost word for word as it was printed. Any bits in brackets will be comments by me either to clarify a point or because I can't resist giving my version of the event, so here goes:

HOUSES THREATENED BY CHASE FIRE

MANY MORE AREAS DEVASTATED

For the second time within a week a serious fire broke out on Cannock Chase and hundreds of acres were devastated. Though at one time houses and bungalows were threatened at Brocton, the damage was confined to heather and bracken and none of the Forestry Commission's tree plantations were affected. The fire started just before 4.00 p.m. on Brocton Common and spread rapidly. (I am not sure where they mean by Brocton Common. All we could see was smoke billowing up from the direction of Brocton Coppice).

Scorched by days of hot sunshine, the heather and bracken were as dry as tinder and burnt fiercely. In many places large gorse bushes were involved and were consumed in a few seconds by flames which reached a height of twenty feet - 7 metres. It was not long before a wall of flame nearly a quarter of a mile in length was sweeping across the heath fanned by a strong breeze. Sparks carried on the wind caused other outbreaks, so that at one time half a dozen separate fires were raging.

This part of the Chase is one of the most popular and when the fire started scores of picnics were being held in the vicinity. Several of them were in the path of the flames and were hurriedly terminated. Dense clouds of smoke billowing into the air were easily visible at Stafford and further afield, and attracted to the scene hundreds of sightseers in cars and on bicycles. Numbers of them, especially children, joined in an attempt to check the fire by beating out the flames with branches and they were assisted by Territorials of the Stafford Battery, who had been engaged on manoeuvres, and Forestry Commission rangers. The extent and fierceness of the fire made their task a hopeless one and the flames were eventually left to burn themselves out.

Hundreds of rabbits scurried to safety before the advancing flames, but others were not so fortunate and were trapped and roasted alive. Birds rose into the air with pitiful cries as their nests of young were destroyed.

At one time the fire approached the gravel pit recently opened by Messrs. McAlpine where expensive plant is in course of erection, but veered away in the direction of Old Acre Valley. It was here that a dangerous situation arose when property in Old Acre Lane, a mile from where the outbreak commenced, was seriously threatened. The Brocton Gravel Company's pit and a pair of semi-detached houses, occupied respectively by Mr. H. Briggs, Secretary of the Company and Mr. Walter Jeavons, its foreman, were directly in the path of the fire. Mr. and Mrs. Briggs were away but Mr. Jeavons, who had been taken ill the previous Friday, was confined to his bed and could see the flames coming rapidly nearer.

The Stafford Fire Brigade was summoned but long before its arrival the flames had reached to within twenty yards of the houses and were burning the wooden fence surrounding the garden. In an attempt to check their spread to the property Mr. Jeavons's nephew, Mr. L. Cooper, Avondale, The Green, Brocton and Mr. H. Revill, Cannock Road, Brocton, assisted by Mrs. & Miss Jeavons, ran out a length of garden hose from a tap in the kitchen, and, braving the thick smoke and intense heat fought the flames at close quarters for nearly half an hour. Their efforts were successful and the fire failed to reach the houses or sheds in the garden, though the fence was destroyed.

The fire brigade arrived at 7.20 p.m. and, thanks to the foresight of villagers who, remembering a lesson learned at a local rick fire some years ago, had dammed an adjacent stream, were in a few minutes able to bring several powerful jets, worked by a trailer pump into operation. A hydrant was later discovered and the flames were quickly brought under control and the threat to the gravel pit averted. A thatched cottage occupied by Mr. Leslie Davies, (Lizzie Smallwood had been the occupant until she married) a short distance along the lane was also seriously threatened by the fire but Mr. Davies was able to keep the flames in check with a garden hose until the arrival of the Brigade. Mrs. Jeavons told a Staffordshire Advertiser reporter that her husband, though not well enough to leave his bed, was not seriously ill and was not unduly upset by the fire. She complained however that though a telephone message was sent to the Stafford Fire Brigade at 6.30 p.m. asking them to come to the scene in view of the danger to property, they did not arrive until 7.20, their explanation being that they could not attend until they received the authority of the Earl of Lichfield to whom this part of the Chase belongs.

Lord and Lady Lichfield (Patrick Lichfield, the present Earl's grandfather) and members of their house party were among those watching the beaters, who for a time were assisted by Lord Anson and a number of friends.

In a statement to the press on Tuesday, Chief Officer A.E. Haywood explained that under their agreement with the Stafford Rural Council the only obligation resting on the Stafford Fire Brigade was to attend a fire which threatened to destroy property and then only after an official call had been received from the owner or occupier. They were under no obligation to deal with ordinary heath fires on the Chase. Mr. Haywood stated that on Sunday the official call that there was danger to property in Old Acre Lane was received at 7.05 p.m. and the Brigade left the station within two minutes.

(This is the end of the report)

At the time this report was written it is true that if a fire seemed to be getting out of control and it was decided that the Fire Brigade would be needed, a request had to be put through to the Earl of Lichfield or his Agent. The Brigade would not attend a Chase Fire without the Earl's sanction. Even when the message reached Shugborough it was usual for someone to visit the scene of the fire before authorising the Brigade to turn out. A delay of twenty to thirty minutes was inevitable. There was a telephone at the Gravel Pit and at Mr. Briggs' house, but otherwise the nearest 'phone was the kiosk in the village. From there the call had to be put through to Shugborough and someone with authority to sanction the Brigade to attend the fire had to be contacted. The distance from the Hall down the main drive to Milford and on to Brocton is not great, probably about three miles. After surveying the scene and deciding that the Fire Brigade was required another telephone call had to be made - this time to the Stafford Fire Service. In those days it was not a case of dialling 999 but of making a call through a manual exchange. Then the firemen had to muster and the fire engine be driven from the fire station, which at that time was on the corner of South Walls almost opposite the General Post Office, to the site of the fire. Sightseers were also a hindrance, most of them came by bicycle or on foot, not by car as they would today, but even a small crowd of people can clutter up a narrow country lane. Taking all this into account the fifty minute delay between requesting the services of the Fire Engine and crew and their arrival at the site does not seem so unreasonable as we felt it to be. One point in favour of the sightseers, many of them worked as beaters to try and stem the spread of the fire by beating out the flames along the leading edge of the fire. When working as a beater there is the danger of the fire spreading behind you as you work. The peat would often ignite under the surface and burn underground to break into flames again some distance away. This is one of the reasons why it is sometimes necessary for the fire crew to stand by for some time after the flames have seemingly been doused. I have seen a flare up occur half an hour after it was thought there was no further danger.

At the beginning of this letter I wrote that the report did not show the exact date or the name of the paper which printed it. However, it does state in the report, "Mrs. Jeavons told a Staffordshire Advertiser reporter that her husband ...". I therefore presume that it was the Advertiser which carried the report. I found the report graphic and at the same time accurate and to the point without the flights of fancy found in many similar reports. We also know it happened on a Sunday in June 1939 and I am 99% sure it was Whit Sunday because the Briggs family had gone to visit relations in Yorkshire.

Of the second fire I mentioned I have no other source of reference but my memory. Like the earlier fire it occurred during a long, hot, dry spell. It started on the hill at the back of here, appeared to run along the hillside heading up Old Acre Valley but then the flames doubled back and spread quickly toward the houses. Although I cannot date the incident it was after the council houses were built and they were completed in 1951/52. Ethel moved in in February 1952 but she was not the first. The fact that all the Rural District council houses were occupied meant there were a greater number of interested persons to act as beaters and attempt to safeguard their own and their neighbour's homes. The fire brigade was on the scene very quickly and it parked near what is now your drive. A fireman lugging a hose sprinted diagonally across your garden and he was halfway across our's when someone turned the water pump on. The hose jerked violently and a complete row of undersized new potatoes shot out of the ground on the water jet. It reminded me of a fairground side-show which consisted of ping-pong balls supported by jets of water which rose and fell so the balls bobbed up and down. Would-be marksmen tried to shoot the balls down and win a cheap colourful prize. I did manage to salvage some of the potatoes next day and I can assure you they were ready washed!

The local policeman, P.C. Brammer, borrowed a garden spade from Dad and along with others did stalwart work beating back the flames at the top of the garden. This disastrous fire killed the last of the heather roots. When we first lived here the hillside was clothed in heather but the heat destroys the roots below the surface and allows the bracken to take over. One of the fire engines stood by all night to control the sudden flare ups which occurred from time to time. It is amazing how long the little flecks of burnt peat hang about. For well over a year after the fire, every time there was a sharp breeze, all our window sills would be covered in black flecks.

The Fire Brigade were able to attend this fire without having to wait for sanction from the Earl of Lichfield and this saved a lot of time, but even so it was the hard-working volunteers beating out the flames along the boundary between the Chase and the gardens which prevented its spread in our direction. The top hedge was never the same again.

This time the supply of water was augmented from the Gravel Company's borehole. A well had been sunk some years earlier but when this proved insufficient the services of a water diviner were called upon. Dad said it was very interesting watching him at work. His divining rod was a Y-shaped hazel twig which seemed to have a life of its own when it was held over a worthwhile supply of water. After moving to and fro for some little time the diviner indicated where he considered was the greatest head of water and asked for a marker to be driven into the ground between his feet. The borehole was sunk where indicated and it proved very successful. By following Old Acre Brook I am sure I could find approximately the place. There is nothing to see nowadays as both well and borehole had to be capped when the quarry closed. To increase the flow of water at the time of the fire Dad turned on the borehole pump and directed the water down the brook which was dammed up to enable the fire pumps to work.

I feel quite exhausted with all this fire fighting.

Goodbye for now,

Love,

Marjorie

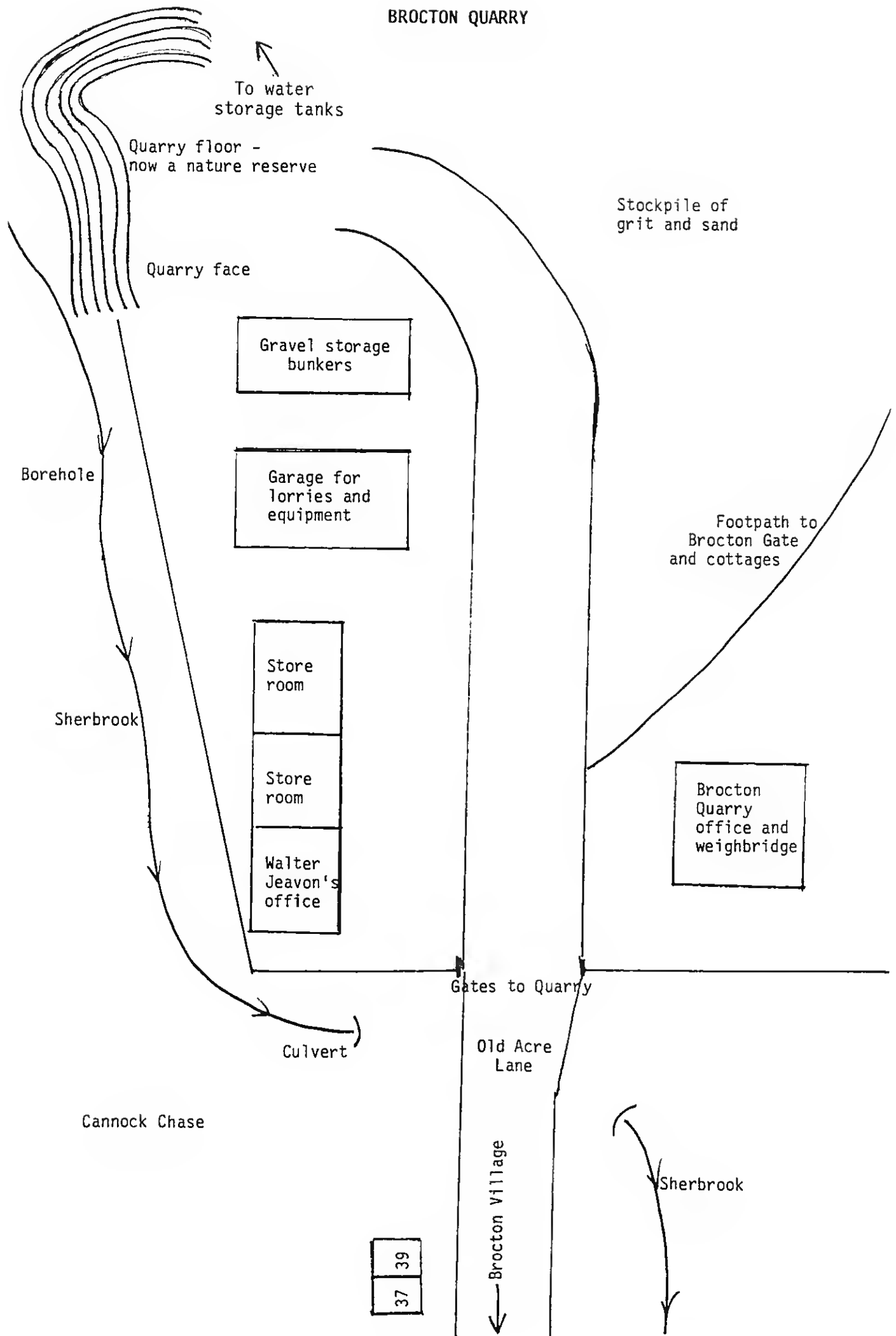


June 1939 - Fire on The Chase.

A pall of smoke hangs over Brocton Quarry.

A fire engine can just be seen in the centre of the photograph.

BROCTON QUARRY



GRAVEL QUARRY TO NATURE RESERVE

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

As if one quarry was not enough in a picturesque village like Brocton a second one was opened in the early months of 1939. This operated on land to the left of Chase Road at the top of the hill as you leave the village. From its position I imagine it to be Chase land and therefore part of the Earl of Lichfield's Estate. One of the McAlpine Companies ran the quarrying operation and now there were two lots of lorries loaded with sand and gravel converging on the same corner of The Village Green. The Black and White Cottage on the corner of Old Acre Lane survived exceedingly well, all things considered, but it did suffer minor damage from time to time.

During the War years there was great demand for sand and gravel. Concrete foundations were required for Army Camps, RAF airfields as well as munition factories. Both quarries ran at full production for several years but eventually the emergency was over and production slowed down. I cannot remember exactly when the McAlpine operation ceased but it was around 1960 when the Brocton Gravel Company decided to close. They had quarried as near to the boundary of their land as was considered wise and gone down as deep as was economical but when they applied for permission to acquire more land and for mineral rights to extend the workings they were refused. There was no wartime emergency to justify scarring the landscape still further and despoiling Old Acre Valley even more. It had incidentally been used as a tank testing ground during the War. The area used was to the left of the Old Camp Road (or Hednesford Road) and it was very interesting to watch the monsters at play, especially when you knew you had made a few of the parts. Some of the Tank drivers were not averse to giving an illicit ride to a spectator. I never had the honour myself, I doubt if I would have had the courage to take the risk if I had received an invitation. It wasn't for fear of injury but because of the rumpus that would have blown up had the peccadillo been found out. Others were not so straight-laced and one afternoon a young girl I knew slightly thrust a pram handle at me and begged, "Please mind the baby for a few minutes, I've had the offer of a tank trip". It wasn't her baby anyway, she was just wheeling it out for the afternoon, as was the practice in those days. Several by-standers tut-tutted, but the baby seemed quite happy and indifferent to the change of nursemaid.

The existing land having been worked out and having been denied the possibility of extending their acreage, the Directors of the Brocton Gravel Company were faced with having to close down. One of the problems was the question of what to do with the land. It was unsuitable for housing. Can you imagine digging your flower borders in the bottom of the quarry? You would need a pickaxe, not a trowel. In any case permission for housing development was unlikely to be granted in the green belt area. The workings would have to be made safe and maintained so as not to be an eyesore. The Bramall family who were the chief shareholders did not feel they could shoulder the long term responsibility for maintenance of the site so the land was made over to the Staffordshire County Council who decided to turn it into a Nature Reserve.

Its popularity today can be judged by the number of cars jockeying for parking space outside our gates. Well, your gate and my drive, as I don't have a gate. "Taking bread to the ducks," is a weekend pilgrimage for many families, especially those with young children. The fact that most of the ducks are Canada geese is a matter of small importance.

Aside from reminiscing about the old days don't you just love that trio of Mallards who have been paddling along the brook to visit us lately? You may feel that the Mallard duck's plumage is dull compared with that of the drake, but this duck, self-confident in her striped plumage has attracted not one colourful drake but is regularly attended by two of the most beautiful Mallard drakes I have ever seen. Plump and in prime condition, their neck and head feathers sparkle with emerald green and turquoise in the sunlight.

Entering the quarry yard from Old Acre Lane, on the right of the public footpath, are the sand banks. The washed sand in two grades, fine building sand for mortar and the coarser grit sand for concrete and for mixing with salt for gritting the roads in winter were stockpiled until required. Many years ago the owners were asked to landscape the banks to avoid an eyesore. This was done, in that Dad dug up seedling trees which were struggling for existence in other parts of the quarry and replanted them on the sand banks. You have only to look over the back garden hedges of the houses on the opposite side of Old Acre Lane to see that they have flourished and I find this surprising when I know they were planted in pure sand. No loam, compost or fertiliser, just sand. It is amazing that they even survived let alone grew into quite tall trees.

In the interests of safety, the perimeter of the gravel workings had to be fenced. Even so, along the boundary with the Chase and the Camp Road, the old quarry face is very steep and almost perpendicular. The post and wire fencing along the top would not be difficult to climb over but it does highlight the danger to that fraternity who seem unable to resist a challenge, however unnecessary and foolhardy.

Another source of danger was the water storage tanks which were a relic of the 1914-18 War. A large Military Camp with hospital facilities and Prisoner of War accommodation was sited at Brocton along Old Acre Valley. To supply the Camp with water and dispose of waste and sewage there was quite an elaborate water-works with filter beds and various storage and holding tanks. The ones which survived to the 1930's were brick built, rectangular in shape and about the size of a small municipal swimming bath. The rectangle was divided into a shallow channel across one end of the tank, probably about two feet wide and a foot to eighteen inches deep. The remainder was divided down the middle lengthways by a wall broad enough to walk on, perhaps two feet three inches wide. Another similar wall divided the tanks widthwise to form two square tanks at the far end. The water in the square tanks I would estimate to be six or eight feet deep and that in the two oblongs to be four feet at the shallow end and six feet at the end nearest the square tanks. The local boys had been known to swim in the rectangular sections. The danger was that the top of the tanks was level with the ground and there was no fence of any kind to prevent anyone falling into the water. If the tanks were full you might have been lucky enough to climb out with a little help from your friends, but if the water level was two or three feet from the top you had a problem, as one poor dog found out one day !



Marjorie Jeavons on the wall which divided the water storage tanks which were relics of the First World War.



Roger our cross-bred Scottie who raised the alarm and alerted my Dad to the plight of a dog who had fallen into a water storage tank.

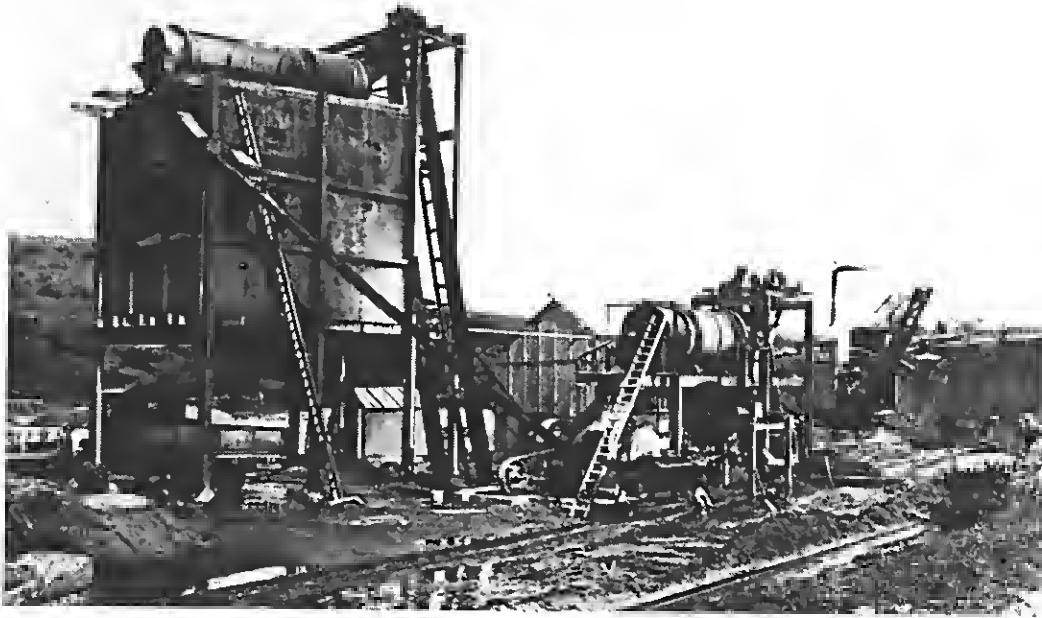
Our dog, Roger, the result of a mix-match between a pedigree, brindle Scottie bitch and a black Cocker Spaniel dog was in the habit of roaming loose round the quarry when Dad was at work. On this particular afternoon Roger stood near one of the grassy paths, barking almost non-stop. When he didn't come when called, Dad went crossly to investigate and found a dog, almost at the point of exhaustion, swimming feebly in one of the tanks. It may have jumped in for a swim without realising the problem of getting out again, but more likely in running free or chasing a rabbit had fallen in. The water level was too low for it to get out unaided. Dad, with some help from one or two of the workers, managed to haul her out. Fortunately she was wearing her collar and identity disc so they were able to telephone the owners who lived on Bridle Road, off the Cannock Road. The family were overjoyed to have their pet back safely but no-one could explain how she came to be in Brocton instead of at home in Bridle Road. Next day the family turned up asking for Roger for whom they had brought a feast of cooked liver. I don't suppose Roger associated the tit-bit with his rescue of the day before but he enjoyed it nonetheless.

Before the general public started to visit the Reserve the tanks were breached and the source of water which had fed them was diverted to flood the quarry floor and form the pool which soon attracted a considerable number of Canada Geese and a few other wild fowl. It is a pity that the water level has declined lately because without the pool it becomes just any old, disused gravel pit. It is hoped that the water level can be restored.

The quarry used a lot of water when it was working. Water could not be pumped from the brook as it would have drained the supply and left the further reaches of the stream dry. This would have been very unpopular with several farms, Brocton Hall Golf Club, Milford Hall and, of course, Mrs. Richardson's ducks at Bank Farm. Nor could the water be polluted as cattle and other farm animals regularly drank from the brook or from ponds fed by water from the stream.

A brief look at the cycle of producing sand and gravel for road construction and maintenance and for the building trade is quite interesting. The excavator dug and scraped the earth from the face of the quarry, dropped several scoops of the raw material into the runabout lorry. The lorry then made the short journey to the hopper of the Processing Plant. As the gravel and earth was tipped into the hopper a strong steel mesh kept back the oversized boulders, the rest dropped through onto the conveyor belt. This carried it to the washer where jets of cold water rinsed away the soil, leaving the pebbles to proceed to the destructive activities of the crusher. The crushed gravel was conveyed to a grading screen. The original one was cylindrical and as it revolved it shook the crushed pebbles through the mesh and the various grades of gravel fell into the appropriate hopper. The mesh screens could be changed according to the size of gravel required, e.g. $\frac{1}{4}$ ", $\frac{3}{8}$ ", $\frac{1}{2}$ " $\frac{5}{8}$ " and $\frac{3}{4}$ " were all sizes in regular production for various end uses. The revolving trunion screen was very noisy, like someone rattling stones in a sieve but on a large scale. It was later replaced by a "Jigger". Here the grading screens were mounted one above the other and the machine jerked with a short horizontal movement which shook the gravel through the mesh screens. The largest mesh was at the top so first of all the coarsest gravel was removed. Then the second screen allowed the smaller stuff to fall through, leaving the next grade on the screen to be directed to the appropriate hopper and storage bunker. There were I think only four bunkers so only four different grades could be processed at any one time. Anything finer than $\frac{1}{4}$ " was jiggled through the finest screen onto a moving belt which carried it to the stockpile for grit sand (concrete sand).

BROCTON GRAVEL COMPANY LIMITED



THE PLANT IN THE LATER STAGES OF BEING ERECTED
ABOUT 1930

The large iron structure on the left was the storage bunker. Each size of gravel had its own compartment in the bunker and separate hoppers or outlets to disperse the gravel. Note the lorry backed up under one of the hoppers in position for loading. On the right hand side of the bunker is the 'bucket' conveyor belt which lifted the washed and crushed pebbles to the top of the storage bunkers where the grading screens sorted out the different sizes of gravel. The grading screen was a mesh cylinder which revolved to shake the gravel through the holes. The screens could be changed according to the size of gravel required - $\frac{3}{4}$ ", $\frac{5}{8}$ ", $\frac{1}{2}$ ", $\frac{3}{8}$ " and $\frac{1}{4}$ " were popular sizes for different jobs. Anything finer was classed as grit and used for making concrete mix. Just beneath the bunker at the back can be seen the engine house which was diesel-fired.

The cylindrical structure in the middle of the photo was the washer. It rolled the pebbles around while they were sprayed with water. The crusher is hidden from view.

On the right of the photo can be seen the Ruston Bacyrus coal-fired, steam-driven excavator. The smoke can be seen coming out of its chimney and the excavator bucket or scoop is raised at the quarry face.

Photograph courtesy of Mrs. E. Cooper (nee Revill)

The water from the washer was piped into a pool or reservoir where it was allowed to accumulate. After standing for a time any sand in the water would have settled to the bottom of the pool leaving relatively clear water on the surface. The water was reddish-brown in colour but little or nothing floated in it. The cleared water was then drained into a holding reservoir and pumped back to the washer to eke out the supply of clean water. After a time the first reservoir where the sand was allowed to settle would become silted up so a fresh reservoir would be brought into use. The accumulated sand in the original one would be allowed to dry out and was sold as building sand for making mortar.

The delivery lorries backed under the appropriate storage bunker, the hopper was opened and the lorry loaded with the required quantity of gravel. Five tons was a reasonable load for the smaller lorries and the drivers could judge the quantity with reasonable accuracy. The lorry was then driven on to the weighbridge and a delivery ticket was issued for the exact weight. For loading sand a mechanical shovel, operated at one time by Len Cooper and thereafter known as "Len's shovel" was used. The only other way of loading sand would have been by hand shovelling, which would have been slow and arduous.

The sand in the bottom of the reservoir was treacherous before it dried out sufficiently. The crust on the surface looked firm enough to walk on but underneath it was the consistency of slurry. Perhaps not deep enough to drown anyone but it would have been extremely difficult to climb out unaided. Once when out blackberrying I saw an aunt who was staying with us sink well over her knees because, in spite of warnings, she felt sure it would bear her weight. Fortunately she was only on the edge and was able to scramble onto firm ground with nothing worse than loss of dignity.

Sometimes the excavator would expose extra large boulders which, if they got as far as the crusher, had to be lifted off the screen manually and set aside. If there were quite a number of these prize specimens Dad would often mention it and when the plant closed for the evening Mother and I would go along with the wheel barrow to bring home what we could handle. You can still find quite a collection of outsize boulders in the garden at "Brinscliffe". There are one or two special ones I should hate to part with and a few so heavy that I wonder how I managed to get them in the wheel barrow, let alone push them up the drive.

When the Company decided to close another problem which had to be overcome before the site could be handed over to Staffordshire County Council was the disposal of a quantity of tar. Some years earlier the Gravel Company had decided to make Tar Macadam. This was the up and coming surface for the Country's roads. Up to this time the road would be sprayed with hot tar, heated in a tar boiler at the roadside, gravel was then spread over the tar and rolled into place by a large steam driven roller. Tarmac was made by mixing fine gravel with hot tar and this was transported by the lorry load to the road construction side. The hot tarmac was covered with a heavy canvas or tarpaulin during the journey so that when it arrived on site it was still malleable and could be spread and rolled into a smooth surface. The tarmac gave a smoother ride in a car than the old tar and gravel surface. Machinery has been designed to heat and spread the tarmac. When the Gravel Company started to produce this new surface the drives of the two Company houses were given the asphalt surface in the hope of attracting custom. I can't remember why production ceased because it seemed quite successful - perhaps it was on too small a scale to be really profitable.

Whatever the reason the Company was left with the sticky problem of how to get rid of a large container of tar. A tanker was hired and the tar had to be warm enough to "run" so it was not the job for a frosty day. As much tar as possible was drained off into the tanker. There was however some residue which spilled out when the storage tank was dismantled. This spillage was covered with sand and grit but for years those areas were best avoided if you valued your shoes. I have not looked at it recently but when I was last up there the tar seemed to have become coated with sand and soil.

The dismantling of the plant or machinery was quite an undertaking. The washer, crusher and storage bunkers all had to be reduced to manageable sizes. The engine which drove the plant had to be dismantled and packed for removal and the excavator (not my old friend, the steam-driven Ruston Bucyrus, but some new-fangled, diesel consuming upstart) had to be manoeuvred onto a low loader and driven away to pastures new. All the various sheds and store places were knocked down and in some cases chopped up. My garage had to be taken apart and re-assembled at home. It had, until then, stood last in the line of buildings in the quarry yard. As a part-time craft teacher I was, at that time, doing a lot of evening work. Classes never finished before 9 o'clock so it was often getting close to 10.00 p.m. when I got home. It was very spooky all alone in the deserted quarry. When Dad was well enough he would open the yard gates for me, or at least come out when he saw the car lights. Otherwise I had to drive up to the main gates, get out of the car and unlock them, drive through and up to the garage, get out again and open the garage doors and drive the car in, collect my bags and baggage, close and lock the garage doors and then the main gates before I even set foot on the drive. If I had extra materials with me I had to drop them off at home before going up the quarry or leave them in the car overnight. I was, as you can imagine, very pleased to have the car garaged at home. The reason it was put in the yard in the first place was that the garden retaining walls at home had to be moved to make room for the garage and the gates and gate posts removed and the mouth of the drive widened to make room for the car to turn in.

It was quite a big job preparing the site for the garage. A lot more ground had to be dug out to make room for the garage to stand, even though it was quite small by modern standards. If you look at the brick retaining wall which was built only a few years ago you can see the depth we were digging out. It was very difficult getting rid of so much soil and any slight indent in the ground was quickly filled in and anyone who was willing to take a barrow full or even a bucketful was a friend indeed. Dad was not well enough for such hard manual labour so I was grateful to friends and neighbours for any help they gave. Ethel's two older boys were commissioned by their Dad into moving a few barrow loads to fill in the front where it had been left very uneven when the "pull in" was made for the six Rural District Council houses. Laying the concrete slabs kept me in trim for a week or two. Harry, Ethel's brother, dismantled the garage and organised some of the remaining quarry workers to carry the sections across to home and to re-erect it.

It was much nicer having the car garaged at home. I could load and unload craft material and teaching aids as I thought about them instead of having to pile them up and to load them into the car when I was ready to leave. While the gravel lorries were still running it caused problems if the car was left outside the gate for any length of time. Also, with the locked car in a locked garage so close to the house, it was not too much of a risk to leave things in the car overnight.

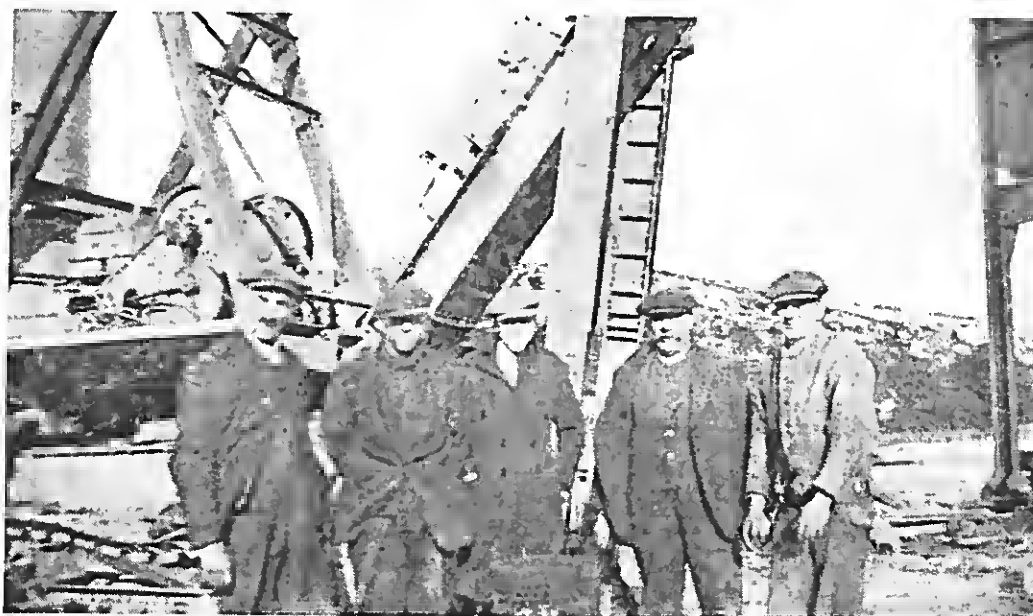
The drive gates and gateposts had to be removed because it was almost impossible to turn at a complete right angle into the drive as the lane is so narrow. The left hand side of the drive as you face the house from the road had to be dismantled and the dry stone wall rebuilt leaving a wider entrance which allowed a little room to manoeuvre. The drawback was, and still is, the steepness of the driveway. This was not much of a nuisance except in snow or frosty weather. The snow had to be cleared right down to the tarmac and a liberal sprinkling of grit applied otherwise if the car slewed sideways there was danger of scraping the coach work on one or other of the retaining walls. If the car slid one way you could find yourself unable to open the driver's door far enough to get out of the car. Building snowmen or igloos may be great fun, but not single handed at 10 o'clock at night. Ethel was very good; if she heard me shovelling she often appeared to lend a hand and many a bucketful of soil she has dug from her back yard where it was protected from the frost.

Well, as they say, those were the days, but you have to enjoy your work.

Love,

Marjorie

P.S. As often happens, one thing leads to another and I have wandered away from the Nature Reserve. We might get back to it, but this letter is far too long anyway.



The early work force at Brocton Quarry.

Left to right: Jim Baker, excavator driver; Bill Hodgkins, fitter; Harry Revill, Bill Revill, my mother's brother, in charge of installation work; Jim Dowding, fitter and general handyman.



The Brocton Gravel Company Limited

The single storey building in the middle background was the general office with a despatch office and weighbridge adjoining.

Later an extension was built out at the back to make a private office for Mr. Bramhall.

The two single storey buildings centre right housed the foreman's office. The left hand side was used for clerical work and the right hand side for general stores and spares.

The large white building in the centre of the photo was the engine house with the diesel storage tank to the right of it.

The tall iron structure behind the engine house was the gravel storage bunker with the gravel washer alongside.

There are two green houses just visible to the left of the gravel storage bunker. They belonged to Mr. Buttery and Mr. Rustell, who were both keen gardeners.



The same viewpoint in 1996.



Brocton Quarry Workers 1930

BEWARE! LOW FLYING GOOSE

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

As the gravel making apparatus was cleared away and the base of the quarry was flooded to make a sizeable pool, it was amazing how quickly nature took over. I mentioned in an earlier letter how, when Dad was asked to landscape the sand banks with trees and shrubs so that they would blend into the background, he dug up seedling plants from around the Quarry and replanted them on the banks. Considering that they were planted in sand which had been washed clean of all nutrients it was amazing how they grew. It was the same story over and over again, as the site was cleared wild flowers native to the area took hold - foxgloves, willow herb, marguerites, dandelions and lady's fingers are a few that I recognised. Silver Birch saplings liked the conditions and the yellow broom was unstoppable. There had always been a certain amount of bird life, sand martins in particular were attracted to the nesting conditions in the hard packed seams of sand but now it was the turn of the water birds. The pool attracted wild ducks, Canada geese and occasionally a pair of swans. There was also a pair of ducks who regularly walked, and I mean walked, from Bednal along the A34 to the pool. I guess their feet needed cooling by the time they reached the water. It is wonderful how quickly a pair, or even a single, decoy will attract more of its kind.

In the long run it was the Canada geese who colonised the pool. To see and hear them fly out in the evening and back again in the morning, they are night feeders I am told, is quite something. I think the sight and sound of a skein of wild geese flying overhead is the acme of freedom, especially in the Spring and Autumn when large numbers of birds are involved. If they are coming in to land on the Nature Reserve pool they are very low and you can feel the draught from their wing beat. If on the other hand they are taking off from the pool, there is pandemonium until they get airborne. They are such heavy birds that lift-off involves a great flapping of wings and paddling of large webbed feet before they manage to take to the air. In the air or on the water they are so graceful but, oh dear! that bit in-between.

Do you remember one Saturday evening when a low flying goose put us into darkness? I know you were on holiday, but Paul and your sister Linda were at home. I was sitting sewing at the table, facing the bay window and had all kinds of electrical apparatus plugged in - sewing machine, overlocker, the iron and several lights. Hearing a great racket I looked up and there must have been close on a hundred geese flying in formation and honking furiously. Then I noticed one bird who, instead of looking where she was going, was looking back over her shoulder and chatting away to the birds above and behind her. As I looked my horrified thought was, "She can't possibly clear the power cable." The cable carried the electricity from the side of the brook, across the road and garden to the front of No. 37, then along the wall to No. 39. The telephone wires do the opposite. I could see clearly that the poor bird, chatting happily to her friends and probably making arrangements for a pleasant evening, was in for a rude awakening. When I dared to open my eyes I expected to see a pathetic heap of feathers and broken bones, or worse still a badly injured but still live bird who needed veterinary attention.

To my surprise there was nothing there except a severed electric cable draped across the lawn and giving off its own firework display. Several neighbours hearing the commotion opened front doors to see what was going on. Someone undertook to stop anyone touching the live wire while I rang the emergency service. This was based in Stoke but a service engineer was on the scene at 9 o'clock and single-handed worked really hard in practical darkness to restore power so we could have light and heat overnight. The cable was replaced completely next day.

I was amused while I was on the telephone to have several enquiries as to who was going to have goose for Sunday lunch. We had not, at that stage, found the body. We did eventually discover the poor bruised and frightened bird crouching in the hedge between my garden and Ethel's. Poor thing! If you think of running full-tilt into a chest high tightrope you can imagine that bird's condition. I do hope she recovered but I don't think she would be able to fly for a bit. She spent the night crouched on the bank at the top of Ethel's garden and by morning she was gone. She probably owed her life to the fact that it was the original cable installed when the houses were built. I had noticed it was beginning to look the worse for being out in all weathers and had begun making enquiries about getting it replaced.

This episode put an end to my dressmaking activities. Our's were the only two houses affected by the power cut.

Well, I was explaining about the gravel quarry being turned into a Nature Reserve but got sidetracked again. That will have to wait until next time.

Love,

Marjorie

Record falls at long last to cool Paul

GOLFING SPECIAL Latest news & results

BROCTON HALL Golf Club's nine-year-old course record has been broken by one of the club's younger members.

It was 22-year-old prison officer Paul Sutton (right) who stole the show in the Shugborough Cup competition, returning a score of 66.

Sutton, who plays off two, stood on the 18th tee needing a 67 to equal the record set by John Miller back in 1985.

However, a badly placed tee shot saw his ball finish in the practice net near the putting green. A superb recovery shot, though, put his ball within ten feet of the cup and a birdie gave him the record.

Next week (June 9), Sutton chases a place in the final of the Pringle Championship of Champions tournament at Muirfield.

He, along with Barlaston's Tim Newton and Nick Isherwood (Beau Dester), contests the regional final at the Vale Golf and Country Club, Pershore.

Competing in the ladies regional final at Kidderminster on the same day are Jean Harvey (Barlaston), Christine Davies (Brocton) and Bev Rock (Ingestre Park).



Results: Rover Cup qualifier (Ingestre Park), Simon Willmore (88-22-66) and Ian Rattram (75-6-69).

Like lady members, Christine Cartwright and Wendy Gitsam, they will have to wait until mid-July to know whether their scores are good enough for the Rover National Trial at Royal Lytham & St Annes in August.

FORTHCOMING diary dates are: Ingestre Park (ladies) - June 5, Bruce Cup; Brocton Hall - June 5, Centenary Mixed v Chevin.

Stafford Castle - June 4/5, Open Weekend, Gents Alliance Medal and Mixed Greensome Stableford; June 6, Senior ladies v Shifnal; June 7, Rowley Cup (past captain's men) & Individual Stableford.

NEWSLETTER
316194

GOLF AT BROCTON

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

When we first came to live in Brocton the Golf Club was already firmly established at Brocton Hall. Mr. Fred Bramhall, my father's employer, used to stay there. He would drive down from his home on the outskirts of Sheffield on Monday morning and stay at the Golf House until Thursday afternoon when he returned home.

Earlier attempts to establish a Golf Club in the area appear to have been fraught with difficulty. As early as 1890 a group of gentlemen from the surrounding area met in Stafford at the office of Captain G.A. Anson, who was at the time the Chief Constable of Staffordshire and they formed the Staffordshire Golf Club. This was, I understand, based on Stafford Common. After some negotiation they obtained permission to lay out a 12 hole course but they were not allowed to play in May, June or July because it interfered with cattle grazing on the land.

This unsatisfactory restriction was overcome some four years later when, in 1894, thanks to Doctor George Reid who was Chief Medical Officer of Health for Stafford, a nine hole course was laid out on part of Cannock Chase at Milford. The third Earl of Lichfield opened the Cannock Chase Golf Club when, after lunch at the Barley Mow Inn, he drove the first ball off the tee which was just across the road from the Inn and close to the Sister Dora Nursing Home. The Cannock Chase Golf Club was formed and the Club House was built at a cost of £1,100.00. The walls were of brick with a cement facing and the roof was thickly thatched with Norwegian rushes. The Club House was used as living quarters for the Professional.

The land over which the course was built was leased from the Earl of Lichfield at an annual rent of one shilling. Considering that the Greens stretched from the Sister Dora Convalescent Home at Milford almost to Brook Lane at Brocton this must have been what is known as a "peppercorn rent". How long the rent remained at a shilling a year I have no idea but I did read that in 1920 the annual subscription for members was three guineas and visitors staying with members were expected to pay green fees of two shillings and sixpence a day.

Unfortunately, in March 1922, just as things appeared to be going well, disaster struck. A spark from the chimney set the thatched roof alight and although much of the furniture and equipment was salvaged, shortage of water prevented the fire being brought under control and the roof collapsed. It was not re-built as a club house but it was eventually re-built with a tiled roof and exists today as a private house.

When I first knew the area in the early 1930's there was a house on the site and it was, or for that matter still is, similar in general appearance to the original club house except for the roof. In those days it was known as the Old Golf House and it was still possible to identify the Greens even though they had not been maintained for years.

BROCTON GOLF CLUB

Brocton Hall, Stafford.



Past . . . the club house just after the turn of the century before fire destroyed the third floor.

AT 10.15am on Thursday July 12, 1923, the 4th Earl of Lichfield walked onto the newly-laid first tee at Brocton Hall Golf Club and officially opened the course with a reasonable drive down the fairway.

The ball was retrieved, mounted on a silver stand and presented to his Lordship.

Sixty years later members of Brocton Hall are celebrating their Diamond Jubilee with a carnival on the evening of July 23, together with ladies and mens competitions spread over the weekend.

Permission

How and why did the golf club come into being?

Officially golf in Staffordshire started on Stafford Common when in 1890 some two dozen gentlemen from the neighbourhood of Stafford met in the office of the Chief Constable, Captain GA Anson and formed Staffs GC.

After some negotiations with the Common's Householders Committee they obtained permission to lay out a 12-hole course, but could not play during the months of May, June and July as it interfered with grazing cattle.

In 1894 thanks to Dr George Reid, the Chief Medical Officer for Stafford, a nine-hole course was laid out on wasteland on Cannock Chase at Milford.

After lunch in the Barley Mow Inn, the 3rd Earl of Lichfield opened Cannock Chase GC by driving the first ball off a tee, situated over the road from the Inn, the green (still visible) being adjacent to the Sister Dora Nursing Home.

Staffs GC merged with Cannock Chase GC, ceasing to exist in 1899. The latter became well established with a formal opening in 1898 of a clubhouse costing £1,100. This had a heater thatched roof and living quarters for professional John Hutchings.

The occasion was taken advantage

of to give an exhibition match by Mr John Ball junior (Royal Liverpool), amateur champion 1888-91-94, Open Champion 1890 and JH Taylor (Wimbledon) Open Champion 1894-95. Taylor won the 18 hole match by 6 and 5.

Golf flourished on the Milford course, the players using hickory shafted clubs and gutta percha balls until the advent of the wound elastic thread ball in 1900.

Dormant

The club suffered during the Great War, due to the huge military camp on the Chase, with damage to the course and the shortening of the bogey six 5th hole, by the construction of a railway line through the course.

In March 1922 the clubhouse was burnt to the ground by a fire in the thatched roof caused by a spark from

the kitchen chimney.

Due to the fire, pressure on the course and lack of space to extend it to 18 holes, members decided to move to a fresh venue - and they did not have to look far.

By a curious chance the 123-acre Brocton Hall Estate, belonging to the Chetwynd family, was put up for sale by auction in 1920 but it failed to reach its reserve of £5,900.

The Estate lay dormant for two years until the Cannock Chase members bought it for £6,000.

Harry Vardon, a leading professional of the day, was hired to design and supervise the laying out of an 18-hole course which was constructed in record time.

Construction began in the autumn 1922 and was completed by the following summer, at a cost of £150 per green. To this day the course is recognised as one of the finest in Midlands.



Present . . the 18th green has now replaced a grass tennis court.

Not only had the Club lost its Club House but it was having problems because it was built on part of the Chase where there was public access. Also, during the 1914 to 1918 War a railway cutting had been established to carry supplies and equipment to the Army Camp. The railway cut across the Golf Course between the Sister Dora Home and the end of Milford (or Brocton) Hollow.

All these problems were solved when the Club was able to buy Brocton Hall along with 120 acres of land. The Hall, which was built in 1801, was owned by the Chetwynd family and it was Mary Chetwynd who agreed to the sale. A new eighteen hole course was designed by Henry Vardon and Brocton Hall Golf Club came into being.

An article in the Newsletter of Friday, 22 July 1983 states that on Thursday, 12 July 1923, sixty years earlier, the fourth Earl of Lichfield walked onto the newly laid first tee at Brocton Hall Golf Club and officially opened the course with a reasonable drive down the fairway. The ball was retrieved and mounted on a silver stand and presented to his Lordship. Now, 60 years on, the Brocton Hall Golf Club were to celebrate their Diamond Jubilee with a Carnival on the evening of 23 July and men's and women's competitions spread over the weekend.

Another disaster was to strike the Club in 1939. The top floor of the Hall which was occupied by the Club Secretary was badly damaged by fire. Instead of re-building, the remains of the top floor was removed and the building re-roofed. This was probably the most economic way of making the Club House serviceable but it spoiled the proportion of the building. A photograph of the Hall as it was before the fire shows an elegant residence typical of the era in which it was built, whereas later pictures show a serviceable but truncated building. Probably not too unpleasant unless it is compared with the original structure. The number of rooms available may be as many as can be economically maintained so it may be one of those unwelcome blessings in disguise. However, looking at it from another angle, the loss of the top floor did mean the loss of a source of income. The dormy house, as it was called, provided sleeping accommodation for members and their friends. A single room cost about twelve shillings a night with a surcharge if a fire was required in the bedroom. Some of the rooms could sleep three or four people, if you did not mind sharing. I presume dormy house is derived from dormitory, which one dictionary defines as a large room with many beds.

This latest fire occurred in 1939 and it was started when some repairs were being made to the guttering and a spark from a blowlamp ignited the dry woodwork. I should be 17 or 18 years old at the time and I feel I should remember more about it than I do. I can recall bits about it, mainly things my father spoke of, one being that Mr. Bramhall could no longer use the Golf Club for his overnight stay but had to transfer to the Swan Hotel in Stafford.

Knowing how keen on golf David and Paul are, I must say how delighted I was when Paul broke the Course Record when playing in the Shugborough Cup Competition. At twenty-two he may be one of the youngest members of the Club but he is certainly one of the best. How long had the record stood at sixty seven strokes - nine years, isn't it? My congratulations to Paul.

By the way, did you find anyone who could explain the discrepancy in the way Shugborough is spelled on the trophy and the spelling in common use today?

All the best, with love from

Marjorie

ANOTHER WHIFF OF COUNTRY LIFE

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

When I decided to indulge your whim and set down some of the things I can remember from the old days I had no intention of it becoming a guide to rural sanitation, but it seems to keep cropping up. I had intended to tell you about turning a gravel quarry into a Nature Reserve when I got sidetracked into the problems we encountered when we moved into "Brinscliffe" and for the second time came up against faulty septic tank drainage systems. The first time was the house at Walton. There, if there was very heavy rain, the soakaway tank overflowed and as liquid of any kind takes the easiest way out, or in for that matter, we got sewage backing up the sink drain. We complained to the owner of the house and he soon got matters put right. He took the attitude that if the District Health Officer had passed the plans then the defects in the system were the responsibility of the District Council and it was up to them to rectify matters. I am not sure what was done but I think the roof water was diverted so that heavy rain did not flood the soakaway.

In our innocence, or perhaps ignorance, it never occurred to us that we were bound to have similar problems at Old Acre Lane. Liquid, as I mentioned earlier, takes the easy way and it refuses point blank to flow uphill. You have only to stand at the gate and look up the gardens to realise that there is no way a soakaway tank could be established at the back. The front gardens had been cut into to provide driveways so the area available for sewage tanks was very small. A shared tank in the centre of the front garden was dug out. When David opened up the old tank a few weeks ago and we all stood around and remarked on the capacity of the hole, it looked huge, but imagine the amount of liquid it was expected to contain.

When we first moved in there was Mother and Dad and me in one house and Mr. and Mrs. Briggs with two young children in the other. It is said that you don't realise how much water you need until it isn't there and neither do you realise the quantity until you have to dispose of it. All the liquids from the bathroom which includes the toilet, water from the sink and from the roof when it rained had to be disposed of. The theory is that the soakaway holds the water until the surrounding ground absorbs it but there was very little ground to do the absorbing. The tank was only a few feet from the boundary wall and approximately half the depth of the soakaway was above the level of the road. Water being water, took the easy way and flowed out through the retaining wall and onto the road. Unfortunately at this stage it no longer smelled sweet and people began to mutter about it, but that did not stop the flow.

Writing about things flowing, I had what I thought was a very nice compliment a little while ago. Ada Bott told me of a remark made by Edgar. Ada had taken home one of our letters and she challenged her husband's intention of settling down for a read. Edgar defended himself by saying, "I like reading this, it flows". Thanks Edgar, I found a lot of encouragement in that remark. It is unfortunate that flowing water is more difficult to control than this scribble.

Back to the drainage problem - we had a four inch iron pipe across the drive from the drain to the rough corner of the old cottage orchard. At that time the cottage garden was kept in order by Frank Smallwood, Jim's father. This pipe, painted white in the hope no-one would fall over it, diverted the roof water and that from the bath and wash basin. This only eased the situation, it did not solve the problem.

The problem was not overcome until the Rural District Council decided to build six houses on what was left of the old cottage garden, between this house and Tam's bungalow. The houses were built in 1951; Ethel says she and Len moved into the house next door in February 1952. These houses were desperately needed as several families were badly housed and living in cramped conditions. Ethel and Len Cooper with three boys and Ethel's mother shared two bedrooms. Ada and Edgar, now with a baby of their own, were still living with Ada's sister Joan and her husband and young son. Gladys and Wesley Baker with a family of three boys and a daughter Eileen were living with Mrs. Kennerley and her husband at Rose Cottage which had three bedrooms. When Wesley was the excavator driver for the quarry they lived in your house. For some reason Wesley became disenchanted with excavator driving and changed his job. This put the whole family out on their ear as the house was needed to attract another excavator driver. The offer of a house was a great attraction in those days. Other families needing better accommodation were Arthur and Betty Williams with a girl and a boy living in the Chase Road area. Jack Keys and his wife lived in one of the New Inn Row cottages and they had Brenda and three boys in what I imagine was two bedroomed housing. Margaret and Ray Bott who lived in a small cottage at the back of Green Farm had two boys and they were the lucky tenants of the remaining house.

The Rugeley based firm of Carney Brothers got the contract to build the houses and they were faced with the problem of disposing of sewerage from six houses, none of which had room for a satisfactory septic tank drainage system. The problem was solved by piping the drain from each individual house to the front garden and then linking them together so that only one pipe had to be laid to carry the sewage underground to some sort of disposal unit set on a patch of ground at the back of where Doreen Clark used to live. It was agreed that the two houses owned by the Brocton Gravel Company should also be linked up. This is why your drains run across the front of my place to the manhole in Ethel Cooper's front garden where they are joined by the drains from No. 37. For the first time since leaving Yorkshire we could have a bath or flush the loo without worrying about the consequences.

Now, if you haven't dozed off, I will finish on a more amusing note, though I did not find it funny at the time. I had been away for a week's holiday with some friends from Sawpit Lane and their young daughter. We arrived back on the Saturday evening, rather later than intended. It was probably the third week in September so by the time we had off-loaded the luggage at Sawpit Lane it was getting quite dark. George ran me up home before he put his car away. He dropped me at the gate and I refused his offer to carry my case up the drive as I knew he wanted to get back to the family. When I got alongside the house, making for the kitchen door, it was quite dark. There were no lights visible but Mother and Dad always used the room facing to the back as the living room whereas I prefer to use that room as the sitting room. I use the front room as a dining room-cum-living room-cum-workshop. The furniture seems to fit better that way. However, that is beside the point. There I was fumbling my way toward the kitchen door, heavy case in one hand and handbag in the other, when suddenly I stepped into "nothingness".

After feeling around a bit I realised I was in a trench which had been dug across the drive. I managed to scramble out and recover my luggage and then locate the back porch. I switched on the kitchen light to have a better look at what had tripped me up. We had no outside lights in those days. Although the War had been over more than five years we were not used to illuminating premises brightly and a sixty watt bulb was considered quite enough for most purposes. I was not in the best of tempers when I asked why on earth they hadn't left the kitchen light on so that I could see the trench. Mother fended off my complaint by saying I should have 'phoned to say I was on my way. As neither of them liked answering the telephone I did not think that would have been worth doing. I think the truth of the matter was that both had sat down by the fire after tea and had not given a thought to the fact that I did not know the earthworks had been started. I was relieved that George had not accompanied me up the drive - imagine if he had broken a leg or even sprained an ankle. He was an ardent footballer in the winter and played cricket all summer so it would have spoiled his pleasure as well as inconvenienced him at work. It so happened that no-one was hurt and it certainly was a pleasure to be able to use water freely.

Well, that's all for now.

Love,

Marjorie



The old Brocton Quarry Office
just inside the gates from Old Acre Lane.

Photo: Audrey Sutton

THE PRODUCE GUILD

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

Isn't it odd the way people come and go through our lives? Some months ago I was looking through some old photographs of the Brocton Dramatic Society and I came across one of the cast of a one act play, The Bishop's Candle Sticks, which was staged way back in February 1949. The Sergeant of the Gendarmes was played by Albert Griffin and there was quite a nice photo of the set with Albert in his uniform.

I had not seen or heard anything of any of the Griffin family for close on fifty years. I would not have thought any more about it but the following Saturday, during the teabreak between two games of scrabble, my opponent Gwen from Sawpit Lane remarked that she had seen Elsie Griffin during the week at a recreational club for Senior Citizens at Rickerscote. Just by way of conversation she had remarked to Elsie that she had been looking at some photographs of Albert. I decided to send Elsie a couple of the photos which were surplus to my requirements. The receipt of these with a note from me must have been quite a shock after so many years, and anyway Elsie knew my mother better than she knew me, but the result has been a spasmodic correspondence between us. She can remember quite a number of people from the old days, more than I can, and in her letters refers to life as it was in the 1940's onwards.

When Albert died some fifteen years or more ago Elsie sold the house in Brocton and moved to one in Silkmore Lane with a smaller garden. This must have been quite a wrench as the Brocton place, which was on the Cannock Road between the end of the New Inn Row and the entrance to Brocton Crescent by the Garage, was the first private house to be built in Brocton after the War.

In one of her letters Elsie remarked on the struggles we had to keep ourselves well fed during the years of austerity. There is mention of the Produce Guild which helped and encouraged people to grow as much of their own fruit and vegetables as they could. On the lighter side the Produce Guild organised two social events a year. In the summer was the Horticultural Show and one year Dad won first prize for three fine cauliflowers. He was not the world's most enthusiastic gardener and it was close to lunchtime on the day of the Show when a neighbour asked Dad over the fence if he had entered the cauliflowers in the Show. Dad was not even aware of their presence, but a quick foray into the wilderness resulted in me being despatched on my bicycle to the Village Hall to make a last minute entry. Later in the afternoon I had to make another expedition to see how we had done. I notice that in spite of his self-conscious attitude to the entry he was not too shy to collect his winnings.

The other social event the Produce Guild organised was a New Year's Eve Social. This was a must in the social calendar of any Broctonian. Always well planned it offered something for every member of the family and the floor show was the highlight of the evening.

I can only recall two of them, one when Ellen Ward and Winnie Riley did a soft-shoe shuffle in shoes soled with sandpaper. The other one was organised by Elsie Griffin. In her letter she writes, "One New Year I organised twelve men out of the village, George Lawton, Harry Davies, Bertie and Jack Oakland, Albert and others to do a Can-Can dance for the party. Well, it was a riot. Six weeks of Sunday mornings at the Institute I was teaching them to dance and on the night, imagine twelve six-footers in frilly skirts, oranges down their fronts, highly made up and a letter on their backsides so at the end of the dance, when they turned round and bent down the letters spelled out Happy New Year. The audience were delighted and encored, so they did it again."

I was among the audience and can vouch for their enthusiasm. What Elsie did not know was that one of her dancers had put on a solo turn at our Christmas Party. We knew what was being planned as Mother had already been approached for the loan of a pair of white Broderie Anglaise trimmed Victorian-style pants that she had made for some reason and a colourful gathered skirt that had been used as fancy dress on many occasions. During the evening our guest had sneaked his costume indoors and he disappeared upstairs to re-appear a little later well made up and wearing the Can-Can outfit. He gave us a brief but spirited demonstration of the dance. Our bathroom, which was used as dressing room, was not stocked with oranges so the dancer had resourcefully used a couple of toilet rolls for his bosom. The fact that one roll was quite a bit bigger than the other did nothing to detract from the entertainment.

It was amazing how people managed to spare enough of their precious food ration to provide refreshments at evening entertainments or to provide a light meal for a visiting friend. If my memory is correct we were allowed 2oz. each of butter and lard and 4oz. margarine each for a week. I think the tea ration was also 2oz. and sugar a whole 8ozs. The quantities varied from time to time but next time you are weighing out foodstuffs just look at what we had to manage on. The sugar ration seems reasonable but week in, week out it had to cover any cake or biscuits you might feel able to bake. If you were lucky enough to have fruit from the garden for puddings or jam making it needed sugar, so with the odd spoonful added to a drink the ration soon disappeared. It is a good job food was rationed, at least we all got a share and inadequate as it may have seemed, none of us starved to death.

Tea and sugar were always bones of contention at home. Mother and Dad had always been used to having two large cups of tea, fairly strong and well sweetened at breakfast, mid-day, tea time and bed time. I liked my tea weaker and one cup was ample. I got so fed up with the bickering that went on as to who had had more than their fair share of tea and sugar that to prove it was not my fault I gave up sugar in drinks from then on. It is amazing what a bit of pique will do. I kept my word and after a few weeks I found that sweet drinks were distasteful.

We also drank Camp coffee which was a syrupy liquid flavoured with coffee and chickory. It did not taste like freshly percolated ground coffee but it provided a welcome hot drink on many occasions. A mug of hot cocoa also went down well on a cold morning. The ritual for making cocoa was to put a teaspoonful of cocoa powder and one of sugar in a cup and blend them together with a little milk, then pour on boiling water, stirring it well. If a little extra milk could be located this could be heated in a pan with the water and the whole lot whisked together until it was frothy. This lifted cocoa into hot chocolate, a much superior drink. It is surprisingly difficult to make good cocoa if you don't use sugar. The cocoa needs the grittiness of the sugar to blend well.

There were no canteen facilities at the quarry and being in a rural area there were no cafes nearby. It was acknowledged that manual workers needed protein so Dad got extra cheese on his ration book to make up for the canteen dinners he was missing. The standard ration was 2 to 4oz. but Dad had a whole 12oz. for his personal consumption. A friend was quite overcome one day when she saw our family cheese ration. A whole pound of mouse trap Cheddar looks quite imposing if you haven't had any recently. The next time we had to provide refreshments for something we pooled our resources and made some cheese scones. With a garnish of garden cress they looked very "Cafe Royale".

The only time I claimed my sugar ration was during the run-up to Christmas when one or two of us liked to make sweets. They may not have been Belgian truffles but it was amazing what could be produced with a few basic ingredients and a bit of ingenuity. They eked out the sweet ration quite nicely, even half a dozen peppermint creams were an acceptable gift in those days.

In the days before sweets were rationed we scrounged what we could from any source possible. There used to be a small sweet shop near to the rear entrance of Boots, as it is now. One day, noticing the shop was open I slipped in to try my luck. The proprietress was a client of my boss who was a Chartered Accountant. She obviously recognised me and slipped two bars of chocolate in my direction but dismissed the two people after me with, "I'm sorry, but it is regular customers only." How on earth can you become a regular customer when you can't even get started?

Well, that is enough about wartime shortages. It is time I went to bed and no thank you, I don't fancy either a cheese sandwich or a cup of unsweetened cocoa.

Love,

Marjorie

DRAMATIC SOCIETY

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

The Brocton Institute Dramatic Society was formed in 1946 at the instigation of Mrs. Patricia Waugh and her husband Major George Waugh. Mrs. Waugh was a talented producer and the Major was skilled at building stage sets and producing authentic props. Everything had to be meticulously correct, which is as it should be. I think I mentioned earlier that if Major Waugh passed anything as "Tickety Boo" it was an accolade of the highest order.

Mrs. Kathleen People who lived on Pool Lane also joined the Society. She was a very good actress and provided experience to the cast. She also acted with the Edwardians, a Stafford-based dramatic society who staged plays at the King Edward Grammar School. In addition to her ability as an actress she was also a talented producer. For a small village we were very lucky and the Society soon gained a good reputation.

The Society's first performance was staged in February 1947. It was decided to make an evening's entertainment from three one-act plays instead of the usual one three-act play. This meant that more members could take part which allowed them to gain experience. There were fewer lines to learn and to remember. Taking part in the shorter plays soon built up the confidence of the more talented members and the rest were content with smaller parts.

The first three-act play to be staged by the Brocton Society was, "Miranda the Mermaid" in May 1950. This was followed by "Blythe Spirit", "Quiet Weekend" and others I cannot remember. I enjoyed taking part in the plays but have little natural talent and I gave up my membership because I was studying at evening school and there is a limit to the number of evenings a week you can spare. I was also doing some part-time teaching of Women's Crafts and this was more important to me than being a member of the local Dramatic Society.

I can't remember the exact date when the Society disbanded. Harry Davies called a meeting which was held at the home of May and George Lawton at Great Bridgeford. The small amount of cash in the Dramatic Society's account was formally made over to the Brocton Institute.

These letters I had from Elsie Griffin may interest you. Elsie and her husband were both interested in village life and they took part in most activities, as you will see.

I also enclose a few photographs and old programmes. The press cuttings make me smile even today. I must go and find the old photograph album.

All for now.

Love,

Marjorie



"MIRANDA", THE MERMAID, AT BROCTON

BROCTON Institute Drama Society were singularly successful in re-creating the essential spirit of Peter Blackmore's fantasy, "Miranda," which they presented at Brocton last week.

The sudden intrusion of a mermaid into London society is a situation that incites laughter by itself, but doubly so when the audience and not the actors are in the secret. Every unconscious reference by the players to tails and the sea brought laughter from an amused audience.

The part of the charming invalid who wrought devastation in male hearts, watched with acrimony, amusement, or trepidation by wives and fiancées, was taken by Jennifer Bentley. Reclining on a sofa, her glistening mermaid's tail hidden in rugs, she brought into focus the theme of the play and roused the characters out of a slow and rather laboured start.

One would imagine that George Lawton, the Society's treasurer, would have been more at home with a set of figures to cope with rather than the unpredictable an-

tics of his mermaid "catch." He was, nevertheless, an admirable proof of the time-old adage that reason flies at the glance of sea-sense.

COMPETENT WIFE

Minnie Davies was competent as the wife of the infatuated physician, and Betty Sillitoe ably managed the role of a suburban sophisticate.

Others who fell before Miranda's ogling glances were Harry Davies, whose artist's temperament made him all the more susceptible, and Harold Hackworthy, chauffeur and handyman, who preserved a superlative woodenness of countenance even when his heart throbbed loudest.

Doris Buttery was a nurse in a hurry with a strong sense of the urgency of her profession. Her overpowering air of efficiency swept through the London flat on the theme that life was more earnest than real—a state of mind that induced instant hysteria on finding its refutation in Miranda's tail.

Margaret Smith was a neat and pleasing housemaid.

ONE CRITICISM

Of Kathleen Peaple's excellent producing I have only one criticism: the misuse of what can be a very effective device—turning one's back on the audience. She limited its use in this play, unfortunately, almost exclusively to denoting anger or complete detachment.

The players, particularly Minnie Davies and George Lawton in the first act, often directed their anger to the back of the stage instead of now and then allowing their ruffled feelings to come over the footlights.

Allowing the characters to take refuge on the threshold of the bathroom while waiting for their cue to speak admittedly is useful in keeping them visible and in mind though aloof from the action which momentarily does not concern them, and in cutting down entrances from side-stage, but it can be overdone, and brings suspicion of ill-sustained acting.—M.K.M.

Comedy And Drama

SKILFUL ACTING

Brocton Dramatic Society, formed a year ago, gave their second public performance in the Brocton Institute last Friday and Saturday evenings.

They presented, in a commendable manner, three one-act plays—a farce, a comedy and a historical play—before large and appreciative audiences.

Every member of the Society is a resident of Brocton and few of them had any previous experience of acting when the society was formed, one notable exception being Kathleen Peaple, already a well-known member of the Edwardians Dramatic Society. Their performance, however, gave ample evidence of enthusiasm and careful rehearsing.

NINETEEN PLAYERS

In the three plays there were no fewer than 19 taking part, all with fairly substantial parts. The total membership of the society is about thirty. For the production the society had been rehearsing for three months and the performance was a compliment to the work of the producer Patricia Waugh.

In the first play, "Form Five to Thirty," a comedy by Phillip Johnson, Mrs. Treetops was ably portrayed by Ena Austin, and her three adopted children Edith, Alice and Gerlie, were played by Ellen Ward, Minnie Davies and Doris Buttery respectively. The three sisters receive an unpleasant shock when they learn that they are the daughters of an ex-convict, Mrs. Boxer, a rôle cleverly presented by Katherine Smith.

HISTORICAL DRAMA

Next was presented "The Vision at the Inn," a historical drama, of the time of Joan of Arc, which was the most difficult of the three plays and made the greatest demands on the players. Kathleen Peaple as Catherine de Baumanoir, gave a polished performance, and Harry Davies was well cast as a French nobleman. In the rôle of Joan of Arc, Marjorie Jeavons gave an imaginative performance, while Eiola Ratcliffe as the hostess of the inn, and Doris Lambert, a tiring woman to Catherine, contributed to the success of the production. A feature of the performance was the ingenious lighting effects in the second scene.

The last play, "Mr. Fothergill Joins the Angels," an excellent farce, was well appreciated. In the part of Henry Fothergill, who, because of his saintly character, sprouts wings, Stanley Duke found plenty of scope for his abilities, while Blanche, his adoring wife, was skilfully portrayed by Edna Duke. George Lawton succeeds in getting every ounce of humour from the part of the vicar, while other parts were well played by Ivy Miller, Paul Scillitoe, Jack Oakland, Mary Clements, Phyllis Rowe and Bertie Oakland.

Officials of the society are: Chairman, Kathleen Peaple; Joint Hon. Secretaries, Doris Buttery and Marjorie Jeavons; Treasurer, George Lawton; Stage Managers, May Roberts, Margery Fletcher, and Bertie Oakland; Lighting, Vincent Heald; and Wardrobe Mistress, Florence Green.

R. L.

THE VISION AT THE INN

A Drama of the Time of Joan of Arc by Susan Buchan.

SCENE I—The Hostel of the Âne Raye, nr. Rouen.

SCENE II—The same. Two years later, 1431.

CAST (in order of appearance).

Hostess of the Âne Raye	..	EIOLA RATCLIFFE
Tiring Woman to Catherine	..	DORIS LAMBERT
Catherine de Baumanoir	..	KATHLEEN PEAPLE
Guy de Laval (A Knight	..	HARRY DAVIES
Catherine's Fiancé)		
Joan of Arc	..	MARJORIE JEAVONS

INTERVAL — Refreshments.



Chairman	...	...	...	KATHLEEN PEAPLE
Joint Secretaries	...	...	...	DORIS BUTTERTY
				MARJORIE JEAVONS
Treasurer	...	...	...	GEORGE LAWTON
				MAY ROBERTS
Stage Managers	...	...	...	MARGERY FECHER
				BERTIE OAKLAND
Lighting	...	...	...	VINCENT HEALD
Wardrobe Mistress	...	...	...	FLORENCE GREEN

The Committee wish to thank the following:—

Mrs. Smith for Booking Arrangements
Major Waugh and Mr. Heald for Designing and Constructing Scenery
Mrs. G. Davies and Mrs. Rogers, in Charge of Refreshments
Members of the Youth Club
All who have Assisted in Production

P.S.

I had an interesting time browsing through the photographs and press cuttings. One of the one-act plays I took part in was, "The Vision at the Inn". I was the Vision and the Vision was Joan of Arc. I can't really remember the story line of the play but as the scene ended I had to leave the darkened stage unobtrusively, make a mad dash to the dressing room, don the halo and hide the battery, switch and wiring under the cloak and creep back unnoticed to stand at the back of the set. At the appropriate moment I switched on my battery-powered halo and there was Joan of Arc bathed in light. I notice one of the reporters gave credit to Major Waugh's ingenuity with, "A feature of the performance was the ingenious lighting effect in the second scene." I well remember another reporter commenting on the faint click which heralded Joan of Arc's illumination with ghostly light. He suggested, rather sarcastically, that we should have obtained a silent switch - as if we hadn't tried! Dear boy, if there had been one within a fifty mile radius of Brocton I guess it would have been on stage at the Institute. It is a wonder that particular reporter did not get lynched, but it just proved how perfect even a small village Dramatic Society is expected to be.

I will tell you, strictly in confidence of course, of another thing that was not quite perfect and that was the fit of Joan's tights. When the play was staged in December 1947 tights were not fashionable and leggings for women had not been thought of. Mrs. Peaple managed to obtain the pair I wore from a place in London that specialised in stage costume, so how could I complain that a pair 3" longer in the leg would have made sitting down a less arduous exercise!

Major Waugh had a busy time when that particular group of one-act plays was staged because in addition to Joan of Arc's halo, he and his assistants had to design and make Mr. Fothergill's wings. Not only had the wings to look authentic (goose feathers), they had to drop off as the play closed. Mr. Fothergill, having transgressed in some way, no longer rated his place among the Angels. The wings were attached to the back of an old dressing gown and a hidden cord operated by Stanley Duke, or Mr. Fothergill, removed a cotter-pin and down to earth fluttered the erring gentleman's wings. I do wish I could remember what dire sin he had committed.

Love,

M.

LETTER FROM ELSIE GRIFFIN

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

April 1995

Dear Audrey,

Having read and enjoyed Elsie Griffin's letters I thought you might like to read them too. I've taken the liberty of compiling them into one long letter. I am sure you'll find it interesting and newsy and give you further insight into life in Brocton in the 1940's and 50's.

Love,

Marjorie

Silkmore Lane
Stafford

Dear Marjorie,

What a lovely surprise to hear from you and many thanks for the photographs which have taken me back many years. I have many happy memories of all the activities we all enjoyed. I remember the old hut and how hard we worked to raise £2000 to build a new institute with a grant from the Council. We organised whist drives, rummage sales (which brought taxis and lorries from the Cannock area), garden parties and even an Old Time Ball with evening dress organised by Vincent Heald and his wife. Mr. and Mrs. Oakland, Bertie and Jack did tremendous work. I was a trustee and committee member for sixteen years until I was rushed into hospital for a major operation. The Lawtons lived next to my mother-in-law in Sawpit Lane. George Harry Davies and Albert have died, Ivy Miller has lost touch with me for quite a few years.

I was nursing at the Isolation Hospital in Tithe Barn Road before and during the war. Things were very difficult then. Did you know the Espleys - the father and mother lived up Brook Lane? The son Victor was an architect. He married Hazel, grand-daughter of the Wedgwood family. She was physically handicapped and could not do much for herself. She lived at The Toft up Pool Lane. Before she married Hazel lodged at Ivy Miller's. I was very friendly with Ivy and her sister and so got to know Hazel. The outcome of our friendship was when Vic and Hazel got married, I with my husband Albert and young son went to live at The Toft, I was the housekeeper. Albert was at Boots the Chemists. We were there three years.

In 1948 we were in the throes of buying half an acre of land by the garden of New Inn Cottages on the Cannock - Stafford Road in order to build our own house. Vic Espley and another architect designed the house. In the last century the cottages made up the New Inn Public House. We moved into our new house in 1949.

Mrs. Alice Chesters lived in the end cottage. She taught shorthand and was born and educated in Flanfair ... P.G. - you know, the longest name in Wales. Alice told me that the cottage had belonged to her grandmother. Dorothy Davies lived in one of the cottages for a few years. Her daughter Ann Marie was born there in 1958 then moved to Old Acre Lane when the old houses were demolished and the new ones built. The Davies' other daughter Heather was born at the Old Acre Lane house in 1962.

Victor and Hazel Espley had a son by then. Hazel had a nanny and other helpers. Ivy and Peggy were wonderful friends to me. When Peggy got married and lived at Milton and later had a son her husband John used to come from there to Brocton to take me to baby-sit. Later on they with Ivy went to Pakistan and so I have lost touch with them. I never remember them having a son but I believe their father Charles opened the Library in Stafford about 1911-12. Ivy used to have some wonderful things, her father travelled the world. Before they left England I had some lovely ebony elephants and little ebony boxes and Wedgwood vases which I treasure.

I hope to see Gwen when we go on an outing with the Rickerscote Club to a dinner on Wednesday. To think we attended Sunday School at the Wesleyans and now we are O.A.P's. But still going strong !

Next door to Ivy Miller was Pat Peaple at Red Ruff. I was in all activities at the Institute and had splendid friendships with them all. We had a Dramatic Society and Ivy directed all the productions with Pat, who was a professional actress, giving good advice. We had a play at the Borough Hall and Brocton came second in the County - I played a mad woman roaming about a bombed city! Talk of Bosnia and Chechnia.

When Pat Peaple's husband died tragically Pat returned to London, her home town and gave me three concrete garden figures which her father had made, he being a sculptor.

There were two cottages opposite Millers. Bryn and Doris Lambert lived in one of them. They too worked hard with all our activities. One New Year I organised twelve men out of the village - George Lawton, Harry Davies, Bertie and Jack Oakland, Albert and others to do the Can-Can dance for the party. Well, it was a riot! Six weeks of Sunday mornings at The Institute I was teaching them the dance and on the night imagine twelve six-footers in frilly skirts, oranges down their bosoms, highly made up and a letter on their backsides so at the end of the dance they turned round, bent down and wished in the letters "Happy New Year". The audience were delighted and encored, so they did it again!

Little old Mrs. Slin lived in the cottage on The Green. It was a quaint old place. The farm in the village was owned by the Cartwrights. The brother Bob and sister Evelyn kept it after the parents died. When Bob died Evelyn sold the farm. She now lives in one of the big houses next door but four to me. She is getting very frail now.

It was proposed by our committee at one time that we purchase some land belonging to the farm so we could have some tennis courts but our plans never came to fruition.

Mrs. Tams' neice lives in Hall Close. I have made her acquaintance at the flats.

Albert's brother Bill was apprenticed to Bells the Printers in Mount Street, Stafford. Years after in the 1960's he went with his wife and two children to Australia. Eventually he had the position of book binder and printer at the University of Victoria. Gwen would be interested I think.

We used to walk from the Cannock Road to The Institute in complete darkness - could not do it now.

Our W.I. meetings were very well attended and had dramatics as well as numerous activities like bottling fruit and making dishes using dried eggs, making a meal out of next to nothing - things were very difficult. We grew all the vegetables and fruit and had a thriving Produce Guild and a Show in the summer. My husband Albert's father had an orchard which he planted when he and my mother-in-law moved to Sawpit Lane in 1935-36 and had some marvellous pears which I won a prize in bottling.

I am just rambling on, Marjorie.

Chase Crescent was not built then, but Brenda and Harry Hackworthy came to live there. They took a lively interest in the community.

I think the Library came on a Thursday, I'm not sure.

Is Winnie Hill still going strong?

I see Charlie Holt died recently, so many old times have gone. We were a grand team, working so well for the new building and enjoyed doing it.

I was sorry to hear of George Brew's demise - he was a good worker. Rupert was at the Grammar School with my son David.

I can sympathise with you about arthritis. I used to have it and osteoporosis of the spine and am blind in one eye, hence my poor writing.

Since losing Albert fifteen years ago I sold the house, which was the first private house after the War in 1949. We bought half an acre of land by the Crescent from Mr. Poulson who owned the garage. I live in quite a nice house opposite the B.R.C. with a much smaller garden. I do all my own housework but only this year since I am now 80 I have a gardener to do my lawns and I can manage the borders, which at the moment are ablaze with daffodils and tulips.

Sorry I cannot write any more, my good eye has started to ache.

Many thanks for your kindness Marjorie, I shall treasure the photographs. I trust your health will improve.

I did not know William Snodgrass, he seems a Pickwick character!

We hear at Rickerscote club that Gwen has had her operation.

I remember your mother very well.

Must close,

Best wishes to you,

Elsie

Enjoyed your letter very much - use any part of mine with pleasure!

FROM MISSION CHURCH TO ALL SAINTS

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

When we first moved to Brocton to live I attended the Sunday School on Sunday morning along with the rest of the village youth. There was a short break between the end of Sunday School and the start of Morning Service. This was valuable social time. Very few children lived close enough to the church to have time to go home so we gathered in a laughing, chattering bunch of youngsters on the corner of The Green.

It was valuable to me as most of the other children went to the Berkswich Primary School but I was already a pupil at St. Leonard's in Stafford and had to travel by the slightly earlier bus in the morning and a later one in the afternoon. So apart from out-of-school activities it was not easy to get to know one another. The unmelodious tonk, tonk, tonk of the church bell called us back inside all too soon. The church was in those days still furnished with the dark wood chairs with their distinctive hymn book racks. I mentioned them earlier when describing the embarrassing morning when some years later I fainted while kneeling in preparation for Holy Communion. I had to be unearthed from a pile of chairs and carried out by two ladies, Miss Loui Joyce and Mrs. Thomas, a very downright lady who lived up Chase Road. I could not recall Mrs. Thomas' name at the time but suddenly it came to mind, as is usually the case when I had ceased to tease my memory.

The installation of the light oak pews was a great improvement and transformed a rather damp looking meeting room into an attractive little church. The new pews, some of which are gifts in memory of loved ones, were dedicated by the Bishop of Lichfield, Dr. E.S. Wood.

A little bit of history concerning the family was made on 17 September 1939 when James (Jim) Cooper was christened at Brocton Mission Church. Jim is the eldest son of my cousin Ethel Cooper (nee Revill) and her husband Len. You will notice that the church is still referred to as Brocton Mission Church, the grander title of All Saints came later. The Vicar, the Rev. N.W. Lawson, officiated at the baptism. Ethel admitted only recently that she had been in favour of having Jim christened at St. Thomas's Church, Walton where she and Len had been married but Rev. Lawson suggested that to be the first baby to be baptised at Brocton Church carried the higher distinction. After all, many babies are christened at the church where their parents married but only one baby can be the first to be baptised at any church. Ethel's three other children were also christened at Brocton, Ken in August 1945, Roy in November 1949 and Margaret in 1953.

Another interesting "first" concerning a Brocton family and All Saints Church was on Saturday, 5 November 1983 when the wedding took place at All Saints Church, Brocton of Heather Davies and Simon Moss. A Special License had to be obtained from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Faculty House, 1 The Sanctuary, Westminster because All Saints was not either registered or licensed for weddings.

The cost of the Special License was £40.00 with an extra £2.00 for the Clergyman. This wedding was the first one to take place at All Saints and just one more has been held since.

I consulted Heather's mother on the subject but she was not sure why weddings were not held at Brocton Church. Perhaps, unless the families concerned have a particular attachment to Brocton and All Saints, most people prefer the traditional setting of St. Thomas' at Walton.

The extension to the main body of the Church, the new South Aisle and vestry, a carpet to cover the old lino on the floor, have all contributed to the transformation of Brocton Mission Room into All Saints Church. When a name for the Church was being discussed I remember a number of people thought All Saints was a grandiose name but now, thanks to a lot of hard work from many people the little Church has the dignity to carry off its title.

No more news,

Love,

Marjorie



Brocton Village Hall

Photo: Audrey Sutton

ARMY HUT TO VILLAGE HALL

"Brinscliffe"
37 Old Acre Lane
Brocton
Stafford

Dear Audrey,

The old Institute which served Brocton people as a meeting room, dance hall and as a venue for all kinds of social and educational activities had reached the end of its useful life. It was constructed originally from two army huts which had served as officer's quarters at the Military Camp on Cannock Chase during the 1914 - 18 War. The huts were purchased from the War Department in 1920, moved to their new site in Old Acre Lane, re-erected and equipped at a cost of about £200.00. The sum I understand was guaranteed by four local residents and the loan was paid off by various fund raising activities.

It was on 14 May 1945 when a resolution was passed stating that, "A new building fund be created". It was not until Saturday, 1 October 1960 that the new Brocton Village Hall was opened. The approximate cost was £4,650.00 but I am not sure exactly what this sum covered.

Money was available through grants from the Ministry of Education but a lot of fund raising by villagers was necessary. A barbeque was held in the grounds of the new village hall and there was a garden party at Mrs. Keeling's home, Brocton Lodge which raised £90.00. Other fund-raising events were a balloon race, miniature railway, stalls and side-shows, fetes, bazaars, dances and on a more down to earth level, the good old rummage sale. Car boot sales had not been thought of or I expect we should have had a few of those as well!

In addition to the grant from the Ministry of Education there was some funding from Staffordshire County Council and Brocton Parish Council.

The Village Hall Committee was able to purchase the site out of funds raised to celebrate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth. A plaque was erected to commemorate the Coronation.

I am not going into details about the size and shape of the new hall because there already have been extensions and alterations. I don't suppose that you are very concerned that the new building is made of Colt cedar. Sufficient to say that it is a great improvement on the old Institute and a vote of thanks is due to the hard working members of the community who made the whole thing possible.

Well, this will be the last letter for the time being. I have not tried to bring it up to date because I feel I have not taken an active part in village life for quite a time now. It is much easier to sit at home and have the news brought to me. I wish I had kept diaries because I am sure there are a lot of amusing things which I have forgotten about, but it has been fun digging up the past.

Write to me for a change.

Love from

Marjorie



Audrey Sutton standing next to Marjorie Jeavons
Summer 1996